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# A Royal Enchantress

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THE QUEEN OF TWO KINGDOM
AND HER COURT IN THE MARBL
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# A Royal Enchantress

*The Romance of the Last Queen of the Berbers*

*By*

LEO CHARLES DESSAR

*With Illustrations by*

B. MARTIN JUSTICE



1900

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## Dedicated.

TO HER WHOSE SWEET COMPANIONSHIP AND COUNSEL HAVE BEEN THE INSPIRATION OF THE LITTLE I HAVE DONE AND OF ALL THAT I HOPE TO DO—MY WIFE.

# Preface.

It was in a brief paragraph of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" that the author received his introduction to Cahina. The meager account of this beautiful Prophetess-Queen of the Berbers, was inspiring, yet irritating: it suggested so much, yet told so little.

It seemed a marvel that the world had such slight knowledge of this great Queen, who, at the end of the seventh century, united all North Africa, with its millions of people, into one great kingdom, and unified so many tribes and sects into a single powerful Nation. It was strange that so little was recorded of a Queen who had instigated the greatest conflagration in the history of the world; who had converted a territory, at the climax of its glorious civilization, into a desert; who had laid waste an empire, covering the area known today as Algeria, Tunis, Tripoli, and Morocco, with its four thousand miles of sea-coast, and its great cities and towns, rich vineyards, fine olive-groves, and farms; who had, in a moment of frenzy, inspired by her misguided yet all-absorbing love of country, plunged this Nation from the splendor of its wondrous development into a darkness and torpor from which it has, even to the present day, but slightly emerged.

The author's interest was stimulated to make a thorough and exhaustive research in the works of students, historians, and archæologists, in many languages, that, by a careful collecting of threads of fact, from a multiplicity of sources, he might be enabled to make Cahina re-live in romance, even if in but small degree.

The authorities all agree that Cahina was beautiful, learned in the sciences and the arts, brave in battle, wise as a ruler, and beloved as a woman. The slight changes in the treatment of minor detail and in the foreshortening of the perspective in some places, have, perhaps, not exceeded the liberties that an author may take in permitting imagination to soften and beautify the sterner and harsher outlines of facts.

The secret of Cahina's marvelous influence over the various tribes and peoples, and her power of harmonizing Pagans, Jews, and Christians, will perhaps never be known. Whether she really possessed occult powers, by which she swayed other minds, or whether her success was due to the magic of her beauty, made irresistible by clever artifice or by her intellectual superiority, the reader must decide for himself: even the ablest historians find themselves unable satisfactorily to answer the question.

L. C. D.

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# A Royal Enchantress

*Chapter One.*

## The Early Days of the Queen.

SEATED upon her throne, a queen—young, handsome, haughty, brilliant; before her, courtiers and warriors representing every type of Mediterranean race;—Berber, Roman, Greek, Iberian, Phœnician, Jew; in the splendid marble audience-hall, framed by architects of the early Byzantine period of Justinian, its ornaments spoils torn by the Vandals from proud Rome itself;—such is Cahina, the Prophetess-Queen of the Berbers, in the plenitude of her power and glory, in the year 697 A. D.

When she speaks, her voice, though low and clear, has all the intensity of suppressed emotion. With craft and skill she unfolds new plans for the increase and prosperity of her kingdom, new methods for unifying her soldiers into a great solid wall against the enemies of the nation, and new projects for the destruction of the Moslem hosts, ever crowding across the Libyan deserts, often defeated, but always pressing on. Those present, representing races united for the first and last time in history, are swayed by her eloquence as reeds before the wind; their eyes glisten, their hands grip convulsively the weapons they hold—they

are prepared at that moment rapturously to give up home, family, even life itself at her word.

The Queen ceases to speak. A silence almost oppressive follows; then arises a mighty shout: "Great is Cahina, our Prophetess-Queen."

The grandmother of Cahina was Naomi, wife of Ibn, the Berber king. She was a Jewess and a woman of strong, upright character, who made a more noble man of the King. Her son, also named Ibn, when he was King, married Constantia,—another wonderful woman, the mother of Cahina. Constantia's life was marked by her daring in war and her sterling character; both doubtless instrumental in forming the disposition and mind of the child.

Constantia, who was the daughter of Gregorious, the famous Byzantine Prefect of Tripoli, accompanied her father in all his expeditions, and, arrayed in her dazzling war-costume of glistening links of steel, fought bravely at his side in every battle. Her beauty was incomparable; of such rare order, indeed, that the historian, deeming himself unequal to the task of describing it, simply recorded that she was "divine and godlike."

Constantia was the guiding spirit of her father's army. She could ride a horse, wield a sword, or throw a spear as well as the most experienced soldier. Her presence everywhere inspired courage and enthusiasm. She healed tribal dissensions among the native allies of the Prefect, quieted religious wrangles and allayed the envy of ambitious, dissatisfied officers and tribal chiefs. The younger officers vied with each other for a smile from her beautiful lips. One instance of how

her phenomenal beauty controlled and fascinated the lawless and turbulent men, remains as a legend to this day; it illustrates the power she wielded:

Ibn, the young King of the largest Berber province of the country, was the last chief to join the army with his forces; and, of course, those chiefs who allied themselves earlier had precedence in command. Ibn was a handsome man and a just and brave King, but he had an arrogant and impetuous temper. He warmly resented being forced to play second part to other chiefs; he insisted on their withdrawal in his favor. This they refused. Thereupon, he called his soldiers together, and prepared to battle with the recalcitrant chiefs for his supposed rights. A bitter, deadly fight was then imminent. Constantia, hearing the tumult, rushed in among the excited soldiers, and, confronting Ibn, imperiously commanded him to sheathe his sword and to order his men to retire. This was the first time he had seen her, and he stared at her in amazement, like one dazed.

"Whence comest thou, beauteous creature?" said he, at last, when words came to his lips. "Thy form and countenance are those of a goddess, not a mere creature of earth. Be thou our commander, and I will withdraw my claim; and my blood to the very last drop will I shed for thee and thy cause."

She thanked him for his prompt compliance with her orders, and the mutiny was at an end. Ibn faithfully adhered to his pledge.

Well was it that he submitted quickly to the wonderful beauty of Constantia; for Tripoli then had sore need of its defenders. An attack on the city was planned

by the Caliph Othman; and an army, under command of Abdallah, suddenly appeared before Tripoli, a city second only to Carthage in importance.

Gregorious gathered an army of a hundred and twenty thousand men. All rallied beneath his banner, because they idolized Constantia. The armies crashed together, and the forces of Gregorious fell back before the fierce onslaught of the Moslems. Constantia, mounted on a fine horse, and fighting fiercely beside her father, dashed to the front, rallied the soldiers, and hurled them against the fanatic Arabs with great fury. At her side, or close to her, the young Berber chieftain fought throughout the day.

Before the onslaught of the soldiers, led by Constantia, the hosts of Islam lost the advantage they had gained. What seemed a sure victory for the enemy, the woman warrior turned into a battle in which the honors were evenly divided, and thus saved the day. The sun became so hot that the armies could not longer fight; each side rested until the morrow.

Constantia, by her courage and daring leadership, so inspired her father's soldiers that the battle lasted for several days. Finally Gregorious—informed that reinforcements had come to aid the Moslems, and fearing his army could not withstand an attack by fresh soldiers—determined to bring the fighting to an end by the capture or death of Abdallah, the Moslem general. The Prefect, therefore, proclaimed that to him who would capture or kill Abdallah, he would give his beautiful daughter in marriage.

This announcement created the greatest enthusiasm in the army. The officers vowed that their one en-

deavor on the morrow should be to capture or to kill the leader of the enemy. Gregorious, much pleased, ordered refreshments served them in his pavilion, and the officers feasted and made merry over the prospects of victory on the rising of another sun. But as the army slept, and the commanders were engaged in revelry, Zobier, next in command to Abdallah, swooped down upon them with a fresh force, slaying thousands as they awoke, and thousands more as they vainly sought to regain their weapons. The bold Zobier, with a band of his bravest followers, forced his way into the pavilion and rushed straight at Gregorious.

The Prefect was attacked before he could secure a weapon. Constantia, seizing a sword, slew three of Zobier's followers in the defense of her father. They pressed close about him; and she, throwing herself before him, received many blows meant to end his life; she shielded his head with her arms; but to no purpose; he was slain before her eyes. The sight so affected her that she offered no resistance when disarmed and made captive by Zobier. All the officers were slain, except a few said to be wealthy. These were held for ransom. Among them was Ibn, the Berber king.

When the sun was well up, the prisoners were led before the victorious army, and permitted to choose between embracing the Koran, paying heavy tribute, or dying by the sword. Those who refused the conditions were promptly slain. Ibn, because of his rank, was granted a private audience with the Moslem commanders, and, after a spirited talk with his captors, he agreed to pay annual tribute for his release.

But not so Constantia. She was led before Abdallah

with chains clanking about her ankles; and when she saw Zobier she burst into a paroxysm of wrath, reproaching him for having killed her father. Then she fell to weeping like a child; while those that were left from her father's army shed tears of sympathy.

Abdallah offered Constantia to Zobier as a slave.

This zealot thanked his commander; his life, he said, was consecrated to the service of his faith; he wished not the infidel maiden as a slave. The other officers of the Moslem army instantly besieged Abdallah for the prize. Such clamor did they make, and so fiercely did they urge their claims, that Abdallah feared dissension and mutiny in his forces. He therefore announced that none of his faithful hosts should take the fair infidel; that he intended to release her on payment of a heavy tribute. While those present were wondering what would become of the homeless maiden, King Ibn stepped forward and agreed to pay the tribute—an offer that Abdallah readily accepted.

When the matter had been arranged to the satisfaction of the victorious commander, Ibn, in kindly tones, informed Constantia that he had purchased not her, but her freedom.

"Thou canst go where thou wilt," he said to her simply; "for thy sorrow has touched my heart."

Constantia gazed at him in amazement. She was deeply impressed by such lofty and unselfish sentiments. Her tears broke out afresh. When she had become more calm she placed a hand in one of his.

"My kindred are dead," said she, "no spot on earth can I call home; therefore, take me to thy home as thy sister, and I will trust my life and my honor to thy

keeping. I will be a dutiful daughter to thy mother, and, in recompense for thy kindness, thou mayest ever command my life and my humble powers in time of peace. In war I will fight at thy side as valiantly as I fought in my father's cause."

Accompanied by as many of the scattered Berber forces as could be found, Ibn and Constantia journeyed to his home in the mountains.

They arrived in due time, and Constantia received a mother's welcome from Naomi, who made every endeavor to assuage the grief of the younger woman. In the many hours they spent together, Naomi told Constantia much of the life of Ibn.

"Unfortunately, I had little control over my son's education," said the Queen, one day when they were discussing religious doctrines. "In compliance with the Berber custom, when a male heir becomes six years of age, he is placed in charge of the chief priest, for the purpose of being instructed in his religious and civic duties. The priests suspected that I was opposed to their religion, and it was therefore most difficult for me to gain access to my little son; but through the intercession of the King, I managed to pass an occasional happy hour alone with him. At such times, with all the earnestness and ardor of a mother's love, I pleaded with him not to become imbued with their heathenish beliefs, and I sought to fill his strong young mind with the light of the true God.

"I believe that the seeds planted there have borne good fruit; sufficient, at least, to counteract the evil teachings of the priests. However, when Ibn became sixteen years old, the King, at my request, caused him

to travel through the larger cities, where he came in contact with the most learned Jews and Christians. Through them he became acquainted with both Jewish and Christian doctrines. Which impressed him most, and at what religious shrine he really worshiped, I cannot, even now, know of a certainty. Outwardly, he is obliged to observe the rites of the pagan religion, and to offer prayers and obeisance to the gods of sun and fire; but in his inmost heart he believes not in this absurd creed."

The kindness of the King and of Naomi reconciled Constantia to her new position. She led a peaceful and placid life, if not a happy one. But the bloom faded from her cheeks. Her bearing was erect and marked with dignity, but more delicate; and the contour of her form was still faultless. A certain paleness rendered her face more divinely beautiful, while her entire presence realized, in form and feature, the original of a perfect Grecian statue.

These changes, instead of diminishing Ibn's love, increased it, and when her period of mourning was past, he sought and won her hand in marriage. She deemed it her duty to marry him, in recompense for his generosity, devotion, and noble conduct. Though her heart could not fully respond to his emotions, she was proud to be loved by such a brave and chivalrous man, and she resolved that she would ever be to him a devoted wife, showing no disappointment over the destruction of her ambitious projects and her blighted martial career. So they were married after the picturesque Berber custom, and in due course their union was blessed with a daughter—she who was later the great Queen Cahina.

After the birth of her daughter, Constantia's health became seriously impaired, and she visibly continued to decline. She manifested no interest in aught save the child, to whom she consecrated all her love. Often she would sit for hours and gaze wistfully on the sleeping babe, and when the little one awakened she would impetuously fondle and caress it.

Cahina grew more ruddy, and her mother weaker; though, as Cahina was able to walk and prattle her mother remained her constant companion. It made a charming picture—that beautiful, stately Queen, robed in white, without ornament save a girdle of red roses twined round her waist, and a narrow band of gold, studded with purest rubies, encircling her shapely brow; at her side the child of rosy countenance, attired in a frock of bright colors with a little burnous of purple-and-gold stripes thrown carelessly over her plump shoulders, and a fiery red fez, tipped with a white ostrich feather, covering a wealth of dark curls. Hand in hand they wandered inseparable through the shady gardens, the sprightly child skipping along in pace with her mother's measured tread.

At such times Constantia would relate to the little Princess some story of her own childhood and of the playmates with whom she had sported in her father's garden, describing in simple language the charms and beauties of her native city, Constantinople. She often told the child of her country's soldiers and of the battles they had fought, detailing her own experiences in the army and her participation in the combats.

The stories about war made a deep impression upon the child. With awe and wonder she would look up

into her mother's face and lisp: "When I grow u want to have a big army of soldiers and fine horses go to battle as you did."

Constantia derived great solace and happiness secretly teaching the little one, during the absence her attendants, to use the Greek tongue, even in l childish prattle; and especially in inculcating into h receptive mind the first simple rudiments of Christia ity. The child was an extremely apt and precocio pupil, and with remarkable facility absorbed ever thing taught her.

The only person other than the mother who acquire any influence over the bright mind of the little Prin cess was her grandmother. Every night, after the evening meal and before she retired for slumber, the attendants led Cahina into the apartments occupied by her grandmother. There Naomi had an embrasure of a large Gothic window reserved for the child, and thither she would conduct her. The window was of beautiful stained glass, and contained rich paintings representing Roman deities. Seated in this embrasure, with a soft amber glow from the window falling over them, and beyond the hearing of the servants, Naomi would relate such stories of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) as could readily be understood by the child-mind. Especially did the story of Moses in the bulrushes delight Cahina, and she showed the trend of her thoughts by rejoicing in the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts while attempting to cross the Red Sea in presence of the Jews. When she heard the story of the treachery of Joseph's brethren, she again foreshadowed her future tendencies, by becoming violently angry and declaring

that, Had *she* been there, she would have fought the brothers and would have prevented little Joseph from being thrown into the pit.

As Cahina grew in years and understanding, her grandmother related to her the more important and sacred events of the Bible. She also taught the little Princess all she knew of Judaism and its rites and ceremonies, until at last the child was as familiar with the Jewish religion as was her instructor.

When the Princess reached her seventh year, her devoted mother became so weak that she was unable to continue her rambles through the gardens with the child. Constantia's beautiful eyes were sunken, her once-perfect form emaciated; on her pallid face appeared the hectic flush betokening mortal illness. By her order, Cahina was each day placed at the side of her couch, when she would eagerly clasp the plump little hands with her own wasted fingers, and painfully struggle to continue to instruct her daughter in holy things. But, exhausted as she was by her long illness, the effort of each attempt brought death nearer. She realized this, but she would not desist.

Notwithstanding the precautions taken by Constantia, it soon became whispered throughout the palace that she was instructing her child in a language and a religion foreign to the country. When the rumor reached the ears of Askalon, the chief priest, he became extremely wroth and indignant. Followed by several of the priests, in defiance of all ceremony and reckless of consequences, he rushed into the apartments where the dying Queen and her daughter were together.

Constantia heard them coming, and it was given to

her in that moment to divine the object of their vis
Before Askalon and his followers could enter s
had slipped from her neck a small cross of gold, su
pended from a fine chain of the same metal, which sl
hastily placed about Cahina's neck, pushing it dow
out of sight among the folds of the child's dress.

Askalon entered the apartments, his face aflame wit
passion. There he beheld the wasted form of the beau
tiful Greek lying languidly on her couch, the wa
fingers grasping the hands of her child, her eyes restin
wistfully on the pretty face, and, with feeble voice
essaying in broken whispers to hold communion witl
her loved one. It was a sight to melt a heart of flint
and transmute its selfishness into sympathy. But
it moved not the hearts of these cruel fanatic priests.

Ruthlessly the chief priest tore the child from her
mother's arms, and, in fierce tones, loudly cursed her
with the curse of their god Moloch.

Under this awful lashing her spirit rose.

Wondrously she gathered together the last remnants
of her strength: she sat upright on the couch, and, ex-
tending one hand toward Askalon, exclaimed: "May
my God forgive you."

Then her tone changed, and with heart-breaking
pleadings she besought the chief priest not to rob her
of her beloved child.

"My soul is on the wing," she said. "I have but a
short time to live. Let me die peacefully with my
child at my side; that I may feast my eyes on her
sweet face before my soul takes its heavenward flight."

But there was no pity in the heart of Askalon.
"Blasphemer!" he cried. "Thou shalt never again see

this child. Thou hast bewitched our King with thy black arts of sorcery; thou hast alienated his heart from the gods of his ancestors, and now thou wouldst exercise thine abominable witchcraft upon this infant, our future Queen, that she may hereafter likewise become false to our gods and their priests. We have long observed the evil spells thou hast woven around our King and his daughter. Moloch's hour of vengeance has come. May thy soul, instead of ascending to thine imaginary Heaven, be dragged by Moloch down to the never-ending torture of his furnaces of fire!"

This terrible event marked the end of Constantia's sufferings. With a heart-rending sigh she fixed her eyes, now aglow with heavenly radiance, upon the terror-stricken face of the Princess, who gazed as fixedly upon her mother; and with this last look on the being she loved above all else, the spirit of Constantia fled to the Most High.

The priests, without looking back to observe the result of their brutality, nor heeding the piteous cries of the child to be left with her mother, bore the Princess to the presence of the King. There they accused the Queen, declaring she had taught a new religion to Cahina and had estranged her soul from their own true gods. They demanded that the child be placed into their sole charge without delay, that the unholy seeds planted in her mind might be destroyed forever; and that thereafter she might be instructed in the rites of Moloch. In the event of their demand being refused, the temple, they intimated, would by anathema declare her an unbeliever, and thereby she would forfeit all rights to the throne, as the law proscribed.

Invariable custom had heretofore entrusted to priesthood the religious education of every male hei the throne, but the rule had never been applied t female inheritor. The King, not yet aware of the de of his beloved Constantia, temporized with them, kn ing and fearing their great power with the popula He informed the chief priest, It was not customary t female heirs should be educated by the priests of t temple, yet, to gratify their high order, he would, wh Cahina should be a few years older, place her under th supervision ; that now she was too young, and still r quired the tender care of her mother.

Askalon feared lest Cahina should betray to t King their brutal treatment of Constantia.

"Oh, King of the Berbers!" he said, with seemin sorrow, "thy child has no longer a mother, nor tho a wife. Moloch, the god of fire, within the past hou has claimed her soul for his ethereal kingdom."

This announcement made the King's face turn deathl white; his knees trembled so violently that he wa compelled to seat himself upon a couch. He covered hi face with his hands and wept tears of anguish. Th priests remained standing, silent before the grief o their stricken monarch. Finally, when his agitation subsided somewhat, he arose.

"I will repair to the chamber of death," he said to them, "to look for the last time on the face of my beloved, whose soul is even now part of mine own." He moved to depart, but was halted by the voice of Askalon.

"What answer dost thou now make to our demand regarding this maiden?" asked the high-priest.

"Do as thou wilt," the King replied impatiently; "but take heed to this: harm but one hair of my daughter's head, and the blood of all the priests in the temple shall pay the penalty."

Then he hastened to the chamber of Constantia. There he found her women wailing. He bade them depart. Long he remained with the dead, and he alone knew the agonies of the hours spent there.

Constantia's funeral was a magnificent spectacle. But to-day no monument of bronze, no tablet of marble, not a stone, marks the resting-place of the first and only Christian woman who valorously fought the Arab hosts and made a bold stand against the irresistible onward march of the Moslems.

After his interview with King Ibn, Askalon, in triumph, conducted Cahina to the private sanctuary of the order of fire-priests. Luxurious apartments were assigned her, with the services of numerous women attendants. A new life began for the orphan Princess.

During the first five years that she lived in this sanctuary Cahina was thoroughly instructed by Askalon and other priests in the worship and rites of all the deities of Phœnician theology. As no ancient nation possessed such a legion of deities, a marvelously retentive memory was necessary to become familiar with the attributes of and ceremonies due each one of this countless host, which, collectively, was supposed to rule the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth itself, and all the elements of air, water, and fire; with divisions and subdivisions for each particular god. Especially was she indoctrinated in the attributes

relating to the deity Moloch, the "Fire Deity," chief and most powerful god. The wonderful mei of Cahina soon mastered all these complex rites, s fices, and observances, relating not only to the wor of Moloch, but also to all the inferior deities; so tha the end of five years she was as thoroughly verse all the powers, sacrifices, and superstitions known to national pantheon as were her priestly instructors.

A strange incident marked the end of the sixth y of Cahina's sojourn in the sanctuary. She was rec ing on a divan, Askalon seated in front of her, test her memory severely in reference to some of the sac dotal deities during the annual festival given in hoi of Astarte, the goddess of love. Cahina suddenly came unconscious. Her head sank back among t cushions. Her cheeks blanched, her eyes beca glazed and seemed to be staring into vacancy, h body became rigid. Her lips moved and faintly artic lated incoherent words, which grew louder and clear as she proceeded, until they became distinct and fu yet soft and gentle, like the utterances of some spir on its earthly visit.

In that semi-conscious state Cahina gave a ful graphic, and detailed description of all she had learne of the festival of Astarte; and thereafter, with miracu lous insight, she recounted scenes and facts that sh had never learned or known in reference to the secre revelry of the sanctuary of the temple of Astarte; con demning each as depraved, immoral, and detrimenta to the welfare of the kingdom.

Askalon was struck dumb with amazement at thi miracle. His blood seemed to chill in his veins.

This mystery was beyond his knowledge of occult things. He soon regained composure; and he questioned Cahina, in the effort to understand this seemingly occult power. He reasoned, if she had the power to answer as to the present, she might as to things to come, and through such means it would be possible for him to become informed of future events, and shape them to the benefit of himself and his priestly following. For this purpose he addressed her:

"My daughter, who informed you of the secret revelry in our temple of Astarte?"

Without a movement of her face or her position she replied: "A bright vision is now before my eyes, and informs me of all the shameful acts performed in the sanctuary of the temple. Hold! I hear the promise, 'Let thy heart remain as pure as it now is, and visions shall appear at thy call in the hour of thy necessity and trial.'" Then, with a start, Cahina awoke.

Not a trace of her pallor or the glazing of the eye remained. She said only, that she had felt weary, she must have fallen asleep. Askalon asked her whether dreams had come to her while sleeping. She replied in the affirmative. He then explained in a kindly tone, assumed to inspire confidence:

"My daughter, confide in me, your guide and teacher, the nature of your dreams, and my skill shall aid you in their interpretation."

She was embarrassed and answered with some hesitation: "Askalon, I would relate my dreams to you, but they are not of consequence. I recall that they were simply about the festival of Astarte."

"But," rejoined Askalon, "thou didst speak of and

describe in thy dreams scenes and people wholly unknown to thee—how comes this?"

Cahina evasively said she remembered nothing of it; and, pleading fatigue, she left the room.

After this event Askalon took sole charge of the education of Cahina, with the view of noting every tone and gesture, every chance expression of the tongue and countenance that might tend to reveal the source of Cahina's power. He was kind and attentive, and frequently, while witnessing the weird ceremonies in the temple, he seated himself at her side and explained their origin and import. Often he met her, seemingly by chance, during her rambles in the paths among the labyrinth and mythological forms devised of plants and flowers in the great garden of the temple. At such times his speech was pleading and entertaining, while insinuating and full of subtlety. He sought to play on her ambition.

"O Cahina," he cried on one occasion, "to see thee a famous and powerful Queen, I would gladly sacrifice my life. Therefore I pray thee, open thy heart to me; keep nothing secret."

Cahina seemed touched by such fidelity; she would show her gratitude.

"Believe me, Askalon," she declared, "I appreciate your devotion, and I promise that when I require aid and counsel, to you first of all shall I apply."

She little knew, then, that the aid of Askalon would be needed sooner than she expected, and that all the craft of that wily priest would be required to save her from the fury of his brethren in the priesthood."

*Chapter Two.*

# The Virgin Sacrifice.

A GREAT drought visited the land. For several months no rain had fallen. The crops were burned, the springs and wells were dry, and cattle died in large numbers. The poor, who depended solely upon their crops and cattle for food, perished from famine by the hundreds. Men, women, and little children lay along the roadway in the last stages of emaciation. The King was powerless to save such numbers: he could give but scanty aid to the needy.

Amid these scenes came the demand from the priests for a virgin as an offering to Moloch, to appease the wrath of the god, that he might cause the rain to fall, and thus end the ravages of the famine.

So, throughout the realm, emissaries of the temple sought for the most beautiful of the maidens. Soon was proclaimed through the land "The maiden has been found!" and the people were invited at a stated time to witness the sacrifice to Moloch.

Of this ceremony Cahina knew but little. Askalon had deemed it better that she should be ignorant of certain religious rites. He preferred that she be not a witness of the sacrifice of the maiden; and, without her knowledge, he thereupon ordered her servants to detain her in the sanctuary, on any pretext whatever, until the long ceremony was concluded.

But the servants were unsuccessful in carrying out the orders of the chief priest; and Cahina, with a mantle so arranged about her head that the populace did not discover her identity, secured a position near the temple where she would not be observed. She arrived just in time to view the procession.

First came the King, seated on a splendid white charger, in rich trappings, emblazoned with gold and jewels. He was robed in a white burnous, reaching from his shoulders to his feet. A white and spotless turban covered his head. He was surrounded by his guards on foot, all arrayed in similar garments, but of coarse material. Each guard carried in his right hand an unsheathed scimiter that glistened with every movement, and in his left he bore a long spear. They walked behind the King, in two long regular files, leaving an open space of fifteen feet between. At the side of the King moved a slave holding a huge white fan, which seemed like a wheel revolving high over the Royal head. Immediately to the rear of the guard, and in like order, walked the ladies of the Court, attired in tunics of white, with wide-flowing sleeves, exposing the bands of gold encircling their bare arms. Rings set with brilliant jewels glittered on their fingers. Following, came the people, in much the same order, in simple garments of white. Thus the procession moved onward until it reached the temple of Moloch, situated at the foot of the terrace.

The procession halted in front of the temple The bronze doors were flung open by unseen hands, and from the broad entrance issued priests clanging timbrels and blowing trumpets, followed by the chief priest in

robes of white, bearing sacrificial insignia. A beautiful girl, not more than fifteen years old, appeared at his side. Her features were small but regular, her complexion of an olive tint. Her tall and perfect form was arrayed in a spotless white tunic. Her black hair falling in loose masses over her shoulders and bosom, intensified by contrast the whiteness of her attire. She wore a sacrificial cap of the deepest red, surmounted by a diadem of bronze, inscribed with mystical hieroglyphics corresponding to those around the image of Moloch. Her eyes sparkled with ecstasy, and her carriage was proud and elastic. No maid upon her wedding day could have displayed greater joy; had eyes more full of love and happiness than she. She proudly proceeded at the side of the chief priest. Three score of priests, attired similarly to Askalon, followed their chief and the victim. Amid the sounds of the weird music, they marched through the open ranks of the soldiers before the Court and in front of the populace, who wildly cheered the procession.

As the King was about to follow the priests, Cahina inquired of a woman standing near, the full meaning of the ceremony. The one addressed informed the Princess that the girl was to be burned alive in the arms of Moloch, to appease the wrath of the gods; then the rain would fall again and the famine would end.

As Cahina received this reply, it was beyond her power to think or act, so much was she impressed by the horror of the situation. Then the blood rushed to her brain, a red mist gathered before her eyes, she swayed to and fro, and of what followed she knew nothing until told of it later by Askalon.

Cahina, throwing off the mantle, ran to where the King and his guards had halted. Grasping the reins of the King's horse she cried in passionate tones :

" Oh, merciful King ! permit not this needless sacrifice of human life. Command them to desist, and give not this innocent young girl up to torture. Prevent thou the burning of this maiden."

Her action and words caused a great commotion among the nobles near the King. The King himself was much disturbed. He bent over his saddle until his head was close to Cahina's ear.

" My daughter," said he, " thou mayest be in the right. I think, with thee, this is a useless sacrifice ; but I am powerless to save the maiden. Should I interfere with the priests, when the populace is frenzied by misfortune, it would cost me my throne ; and now I warn thee, let not the people hear thy plea for this young girl at this time, or thy life is lost."

" I care not ! " cried Cahina ; and before the King could detain her she ran through the crowd, and to a position beside the maiden. The priests were chanting and sounding the musical instruments as Cahina implored the maiden to submit not to the torture, but to demand her release and restoration to her family.

The maiden gazed at her a moment with amazement in her dreamy eyes, then smiled gently.

" O Princess," she explained, " I am beholden to thee for thine intended kindness, but I must not heed thy counsel. By my religious teaching I know that my selection for the sacrifice to Moloch is the highest honor that could be conferred on a young girl. To die for her race, to become the saviour and the pride of her

nation, is not this grand and holy? Will not all the ages yet to come worship her as a saint and martyr? It sanctifies my soul, which will live in Paradise with all our gods. I shall not suffer. The chief priest has taught me all."

Askalon, who had been walking ahead of the maiden, turned, as she finished speaking, and beheld Cahina for the first time. He was startled out of his usual composure.

"What art thou doing here at such a time?" he cried, with rising voice.

"I have come to save the maiden from torture."

"Nay," responded Askalon quickly. "Not even the pupil that I love as a daughter dare interfere with the wedding of Moloch. Haste thee to the sanctuary and await my coming, ere the people learn of thy mission and destroy thee in their fury."

"I fear not the people," replied Cahina calmly. "Thou must not give the maiden up as a sacrifice."

The procession having halted while Cahina and Askalon talked, the people pressed forward to learn the cause. They quickly divined the situation, and from the thousands assembled there arose on every side a hoarse murmur, like the growling of wild beasts robbed of their prey. The angry voices swelled into a mighty roar, that made the King and his attendants and the high-priest turn pale.

In the midst of the tumult Askalon started forward with the maiden. The priests, who had been chanting in a low tone, at a signal from the chief raised their voices. The people, wild-eyed and shouting, pressed forward from every side.

With a single bound, Cahina stood before Askalon. There was in her eyes a glow that the chief priest had seen there once before. "Hold!" she cried, and above her head she raised her right hand.

Askalon stopped with the suddenness of one running against a wall in the dark. The chanting ceased, the sound of instruments was no longer heard. The pushing, jostling, clawing mass of people halted in its tracks as if turned to stone. From that vast throng not a sound was heard. The leaves on the trees rustled with a startling distinctness.

Every eye was turned upon the slight figure of the girl, standing as if carved from marble. They forgot she was the King's daughter; remembered not her age; were unmindful of everything save that she appeared to tower above the tallest man, and that the hand upraised seemed to them the hand of Fate itself.

For a moment she stood thus. Then her eyes closed, her hand fell to her side, and she dropped to the ground unconscious.

Askalon was the first to recover. He made a quick signal. Several priests stepped forward, received brief instructions, and bore Cahina quickly to the outer edge of the throng, where several of her servants were grouped. There she seemed to recover sufficiently to witness the end of the ceremony. Though she looked on it, even her servants knew she did not realize what was happening before her; and they gently led her to the sanctuary like one asleep.

When Cahina had been carried away, the priests began anew their weird chant, the people threw off the spell cast over them by the Princess, and the procession con-

tinued until an open space in front of the temple was reached. In this court of the sacred edifice stood a large square column of white marble, twenty-five feet high. Marble stairways on each side led to the summit, which was perfectly level. Half of the level space was occupied by a black marble slab, upon which stood an enormous and hideous image of dulled bronze, with folded arms.

When the priests reached the lower step of the stairway they fell flat upon their faces, and humbly beseeched Moloch to accept the sacrifice they brought him. With great moaning they bewailed their sins, and prayed that he cause the rain to fall again upon the scorched and blasted fields, and restore abundance and prosperity to the famine-stricken land. Their prayer finished, they arose and closely surrounded the four sides of the altar, forming four solid walls of priests at the foot of the structure, with a passage for the chief priest and the girl.

Together they came—the priest proudly, with erect carriage; she demurely, with head bent. Amid the clashing of instruments, the loud chanting of the priests, and the continuous shouting of the populace they slowly ascended the steps until the apex was reached. Then the chief priest raised his hands, and all became silent. His invocations and incantations to Moloch were long, and all were filled with passionate appeals and mysterious actions. The assemblage was deeply affected.

Askalon finished, and approached the girl. He removed the crown from her head and the sandals from her feet; he then led her over the stone to the black

marble center, close to the brazen image of the god, where she dropped to her knees in prayer. He touched it with uplifted hand, and behold! the image stretched out its ponderous arms of brass, and from them dropped to its feet a huge bundle of dried fagots. The chief priest, raising the maiden from the sacred stone whereon she had been kneeling, pushed her into the arms of Moloch, and sprang back. The arms, grasping the victim tightly, enfolded as at first, and she was firmly clutched to the bronze breast.

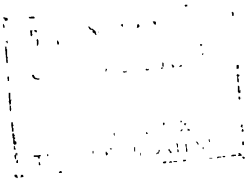
With a swift glance over the idol, the high-priest pressed upon another device and an embrasure appeared, from which he drew a lighted torch. Quickly with it he touched the fagots exposed, and instantly a fierce blaze sprang up and enveloped the form of the maiden. The light of happiness left her face, and her piercing screams and cries for mercy rent the air. She fixed her wild eyes upon the chief priest, and, in the last throes of agony, denounced him:

"Thou false priest, thou didst lie! Thou saidst the fire would not pain. Be accursed for thy false and hellish tongue, and may thy gods consume thy vile body with their tortures and their fires, as thou hast mine!"

The flames rose higher, her once-beautiful head dropped,—she was past suffering. After the necessary time had elapsed, the chief priest gathered up the ashes in sacred vessels and scattered equal portions to the winds,—at each of the four sides of the marble altar,—proclaiming that the wrath of Moloch was appeased by the bride he had taken to his arms in all her loveliness, and that he would now send forth the rain, and the drought and famine would cease, and the land again



THE INNOCENT VICTIM OF THE SACRIFICE DENOUNCING THE PERFIDY OF THE HIGH-PRIEST.



become fruitful and abound with plenty. And the populace, now joyful, dispersed.

On the fourth day thereafter rain fell in torrents. Great was Moloch!

When the ceremony was concluded, the priests gathered about Askalon, and in angry tones demanded that Cahina be given into their custody, that she might be properly punished for having interfered in the most sacred rights of their Order. The priests were insistent, and all the wit of their chief priest was necessary to avert serious consequences to his pupil. He finally quelled their clamor by stating that Cahina was not responsible for her actions, as she had been temporarily possessed by the spirit of Constantia, her sorceress-mother. He promised he would exorcise the evil spirit; to leave her with him.

The priests departed, muttering to themselves.

Askalon hastened to the sanctuary, animated by the hope that he would find Cahina in the sleep in which she read the future. But in this he was disappointed; she had recovered. And when Askalon told of the great danger that had threatened her, and how he had caused the priests to forego their determination to wreak vengeance on her, she told him she knew nothing of what had occurred beyond seeing the procession and the maiden being led to the temple of Moloch—which explanation the high-priest then doubted, but later he fully believed.

After these incidents, the intercourse between teacher and pupil was more friendly. The tie of mutual interest became stronger, yet Askalon could not win the confidence of Cahina, though he made subtle efforts

to do so. Nor did he succeed in solving the mystery of her prophetic visions. Frequently he taxed her mental powers to their utmost by much study, with the hope that such tension of the brain would throw her into another sleep and her prophetic soul would then reveal to him great events of the future. His hopes had no fruition; for Cahina performed with ease all the duties devolving upon her.

The days glided by into weeks, and weeks into months, and Cahina had made no other demonstration of a supernatural character. One evening when she was again ensconced among the cushions in the hall of learning, Askalon stood before her, warmly upholding the priests' rights and authority in the administration of the civil affairs of the kingdom. Cahina suddenly sprang to her feet, exclaiming in clear tones: "He is coming!" Then with outstretched arms she moved slowly to the center of the great hall, and there stood as one transfixed; her uplifted arms were rigidly directed and her eyes staring fixedly toward the wide and open doorway.

Askalon followed the direction of her gaze, but saw nothing. She gradually swerved round and approached him, halting within a few paces from where he was standing. Her eyes, which seemed to be piercing futurity, rested full upon him. Then, to his amazement and wonder, he heard a voice in firm accents saying: "Askalon, I command thee to repair at once to Egypt, and that thou bring hither the priest named Nibamon, that he may initiate me into all the holy mysteries that I have so longed to know. Obey ere the setting of the sun on the third day; and now be gone!"

Her hand pointed to the door. An irresistible force overcame Askalon. His will deserted him. He was unable to resist the command, and, like a frightened child, he reluctantly moved in the direction her finger indicated. She remained fixed as a statue, her eyes fastened upon his retreating form; but as he passed the portal Cahina's arm dropped to her side, her eyelids quivered, and her face assumed an appearance of exhaustion. Then she threw herself among the cushions of the divan, where she lay motionless until the darkness of night enveloped the great hall of learning.

One of her servants, who had searched in vain throughout the building for her mistress, at last found her lying there. Believing that the Princess slept, the servant touched her shoulder lightly, to waken her.

Cahina rose languidly, like one aroused from a dream; silently she followed the servant.

This event intensified the mystery, and Askalon was still unable to determine whether the manifestations he had witnessed were real or feigned. He could not doubt that Cahina was possessed of extraordinary occult power; the conviction came that this great mystery must be solved before his departure, else he could not wisely confer with the priest Nibamon. He still believed that in time he would win her confidence and acquire dominion over her soul, so that when she ascended the throne he would become her sole confidant. His ambition reached even to a loftier pinnacle, —to the very throne itself. With such reveries filling his mind he sought the Royal presence.

Without resorting to the usual Court phrases and paraphrases, he immediately addressed the King:

"Thy daughter, within the last few years, has drunk deep from our fountain of knowledge, and her mind is now replete with learning that her retentive memory will never lose. She now knows all her instructor can teach her. Our erudition is fully shared by her. Know, however, that her soul is still longing for more light. She now desires to acquire the hidden lore of the Egyptians. Therefore I pray thee, O King, to gain the honor of having a daughter renowned throughout the world as the most learned and wonderful Queen of this and of all ages, permit me to go to Egypt, that I may bring back with me Nibamon, the priest, to impart such secret knowledge to thy daughter's eager mind as may be deemed wise."

The King was deeply impressed by this request; the wish of his beloved daughter touched his heart, and for several minutes he strode up and down the room in silence. Then he abruptly confronted the priest:

"Askalon, though I take pride in Cahina's learning, thy proposition would thwart the plans I had formed in regard to her. I will not, however, suffer my conscience to reproach me at some future time for denying her aught that she desired. Therefore will I sacrifice my personal aims, to her lasting welfare. Depart at once for Egypt, search for this learned priest, and bring him back with thee."

Askalon again sought Cahina, and informed her of the success of his mission to her father. He then made another effort to induce her to explain how she unveiled the mysteries of the future.

"Askalon," Cahina replied, "the time has now arrived when I am allowed to make unto thee, as the

chief priest of our religion, a revelation, in part, of the nature of the manifestation thou hast witnessed. Thou must sacredly bind thyself not to disclose my secret. Since the death of my mother Constantia, whenever my soul becomes heavy with grief, or when in great emergency or danger my mind becomes perplexed as to how I should act, then there appears before me my guardian angel, leading me to the right path and enlightening my benighted soul, comforting me in divine accents and giving me wondrous power to overcome all obstacles. I have no warning of the visitation. Only, when I suddenly feel a current like a fiery stream coursing through my veins and seizing my brain, am I apprised of my guardian angel's approach. Then it seems to me my soul soars into illimitable space, until the spirit touches and breathes upon my forehead, cooling my fevered blood. Then my soul descends to earth again and rests there in mute awe, listening to the counsel and command of the angel, which I involuntarily follow and implicitly obey. Rest thee in this simple statement, and seek no further knowledge!"

Askalon was amazed; he had listened with close attention to Cahina's story, and when she had finished he bowed low in profound reverence.

"Great Princess," he humbly said, "I am content with thy marvelous revelation. I will annoy thee with no further questions as to thy wonderful gift. Grant me but the boon of being thy slave; an instrument blindly to execute thy commands, whether they emanate from our own sphere or from worlds unknown. As to my mission, hast thou any instructions in the search for this Egyptian priest, him thou callest

Nibamon? Knowest thou by what means we may discover him? And will he come with me?"

"Askalon," replied Cahina, "Alexandria has fallen into the hands of the Mohammedans. The Moslem conquerors of Egypt have dismantled its holy temple, destroyed its gods, and dispersed its priests; therefore, seek him in the secret, subterranean crypts of the temple of Serapis, near Alexandria. There wilt thou find him. Tell him who thou art, and disclose thy mission. He will ask no question, but will understand the command. He will forthwith follow thee to our land."

Askalon reached Alexandria and proceeded to the temple of Serapis. He found nothing remaining of the noble edifice save its lofty and grand columns of marble, supporting the great bronze roof. The interior walls were demolished, and the entire temple stripped of all its sacred furnishings. Without exciting suspicion he cautiously inquired, from native Egyptians, where he would find some of the former priests of the temple. After some delay, he was told by an old woman to stand near the gates of the desolated temple at the hour of midnight.

He did so on the following night until a tall man, muffled and mantled, beckoned him silently to follow him into the ruins. They went on until Askalon was seized in a vise-like grip and blindfolded. Then he felt himself raised and carried through a tortuous underground passage. At length the bandage was removed, when he found himself in a cavern dug out of solid rock, lighted by scores of small lamps. At one side stood a raised dais covered with black cloth, where sat three figures, like statues, enveloped in yellow

cloths. Under their head-covering three pairs of eyes glittered piercingly through small openings.

Askalon noticed that the floor was littered with fragments of demolished gods and goddesses. Space was left in the center for a passage to the raised platform. In the spaces between the pillars were a great number of broken arms and hands of all sizes, colors, and material. Upon these Askalon gazed wonderingly. Suddenly he heard a harsh, deep-toned, and imperious voice addressing him :

" Stranger, when thou hast satisfied thine idle curiosity, hearken to my words."

Askalon replied that it was not with idle curiosity, but with grief, that he viewed the destruction of Egypt's gods. He then explained his mission, and displayed his credentials; and the priests, convinced of the honesty of his purpose, called to the chamber Nibamon, who, as Cahina had prophesied, without asking any questions, agreed to go with him to Mauritania.

Nibamon was tall in stature, but extremely thin and bent. His cheeks were pale and sunken, but his eyes, which were soft and luminous, beamed with vivacity and intelligence.

Askalon, Nibamon, and the chief of the priests in the cavern consulted as to the best and safest means to effect the escape of Nibamon from Alexandria ; and it was at last decided that Askalon should assume the disguise of a traveling merchant, and that Nibamon should pose as his servant.

This plan they attempted forthwith to put into execution, but ere they could get out of the city, Askalon and the chief priest, while in the ruins of the temple,

were captured by the Arabs. A mob then attacked the soldiers, and the chief priest was rescued,but Askalon was thrown into prison. After being placed in the dungeon, Askalon was left for a day and a night without food or water. For two days more, though he saw no one, he found a loaf of fresh bread and some cool water on the floor of his cell.

On the third day, a Moslem officer and three soldiers entered the cell. The officer informed Askalon that the Commander of the army had learned about him, and had ordered that he tell all he knew as to the whereabouts of the priests in Alexandria.

This Askalon refused to do; and when he persisted in refusing, burly negroes applied the bastinado—held to be an indelible disgrace, because it rendered the recipient, whether innocent or guilty, incapable of performing priestly functions, or of holding any office of State ; it made him an outcast, to be thereafter shunned by all, and he became a pariah.

At every stroke Askalon groaned and cried out in agony, and invoked Moloch to send down blazing columns of fire to consume the Moslem fiends. The lashing continued until he became unconscious from pain and loss of blood, Then they threw him into the cell and left him there. Two days later he was brought out and told that he was to be taken before the Commander of the Moslem army in Egypt.

The Oriental splendor of the hall through which he was conducted, dazzled the eyes of the high-priest, and he looked round him with increasing wonder. At the further end of the room, he saw, on a raised platform of jet-black marble, a beautiful throne of ivory, studded

with precious stones, and flanked on both sides by superb bronze lions, stretched out at their ease. As he drew near he heard the confused murmur of a large crowd of Mussulmans at the foot of the throne, seemingly addressing some one in it; but when he reached the first step of the platform, he could scarce believe his eyes when he saw that the ivory throne was empty. Was it possible, thought he, that the crowd worshiped a vacant throne, as a symbol of the divinity of its possessor, as men were once commanded to worship Caracalla's horse, as a divine emblem of the Roman Emperor himself. But he was soon undeceived; for his guard, stopping before the crowd squatting round the steps of the throne, addressed one of the number as Amru. As if in a dream Askalon heard some one say, in tones of authority, "Bring hither your prisoner."

To his utter amazement the guard brought him before a man seated cross-legged on a leather cushion, saying: "In the name of Allah, I deliver unto thee, Amru, the foreign priest found in the company of the high-priest of Alexandria."

Askalon was dazed. He had expected to find Amru, the Commander of the Moslem host, the great conqueror of Syria and Egypt, a stern, bearded veteran, clad in the panoply of a warrior, defiantly seated on the throne of the Pharaohs. But here was a pale, smooth-faced man, of gentle and intelligent mien, actually seated on the floor like a common Bedouin, clad in a patched, dirty, and faded garb of an Arab, at the foot of Egypt's gorgeous throne, in the midst of his subordinates.

Amru was indeed a wonderful man, and his history was still more wonderful, as Askalon learned later from

the lips of Nibamon. He was the son of a notorious courtesan from Mecca, who rivaled the celebrated Phryne and Theodora in the beauty of her face, the grace of her form, and the witchery of her manners. Her irresistible powers of fascination enrolled in her catalogue of lovers the wealthiest and most high-born in the land. The noble and gallant youths of the different tribes vied with each other in the conquest of her venal love. When the child was born, she ascribed its paternity to several of the leading men of the Korash tribe. After a spirited disputation, the doubtful honor of the boy's paternity was at last awarded to one Aas, he being the richest and oldest of her lovers. The child was named Amru Ibn al Aas, the son of Aas. The reputed father adopted his natural son, took him into his house, and lavished upon him more affection, and reared him with more care and solicitude, than he did his legitimate children.

In addition to receiving rich tokens of paternal generosity, nature, equally beneficent, endowed the child Amru with many graces of mind and body. He developed into a handsome and talented youth, and the beauty of his mother's face and the brilliancy of her mind seemed to assume a subtler, more fascinating, phase when blended with his manly strength. He became the idol of his tribe. The women sought his love; the men coveted his friendship. His great popularity gently wiped out the stigma of his birth. To further enhance the esteem in which he was held, he then devoted himself to poetry, deemed among the Arabs as the noblest of all professions, and the perfection of art and literature. While still young, Amru became

famous as a poet throughout the land, and before he was converted to Islamism, his poetic attacks on the claims of Mahomet retarded the growth of the faith more than all other opposition. Later, when he learned to accept the teachings of Mahomet, he became a most enthusiastic and devout believer, made many converts, and triumphantly planted Islam's banners, with fire and sword, in foreign kingdoms.

The conqueror of Egypt and other lands was the same Amru before whom Askalon now appeared as a prisoner, awaiting his doom. Making a low obeisance,—so low that his forehead touched the ground,—the high-priest waited to be addressed.

With but little circumlocution he was commanded to tell his story; and was reminded that he must keep close to the facts, that the truth might save his life; but a lie would forfeit it.

"My name is Askalon," he said, "I am the subject of good King Ibn, of Berber fame. I am the Sem, the high-priest of the religion of the land. My King has an only child, Cahina, a beautiful and gifted maiden, heiress to the throne. The King selected me to superintend her education, not only in religious affairs, but also in the arts and sciences. Our Order, our priesthood, undertook this task. The child being miraculously endowed, soon became familiar with the teachings of the priesthood, till they could proceed no further with her. Therefore our King sent me into Egypt to seek some famous sage, capable of imparting to her the knowledge of esoteric mysteries. This, great Emir, is the only cause for my seemingly stealthy visit, during the hours of darkness, to the temple of Serapis. There-

fore, most upright ruler, I am neither a spy, coming from an enemy to pry into thine affairs, nor a subject of this land, but a stranger here on matters just and true. I do beseech thee, in thine honor and valor, to mete out justice to thy servant, and permit that I return to mine own country free from further punishment."

The Emir listened with rapt attention to Askalon's brief recital. When it was finished, he was absorbed in some pleasant reverie. Recalling himself, he said: "I believe thy story, but, before disposing of thine affairs, let me hear more of this wonderful Cahina. Is she indeed so very beautiful? Does she possess a matchless form, or is her charm merely that of a cheerful disposition and an amiable mind?"

Askalon instantly seized the hint. He thought by pandering to the lustful curiosity of the Emir, substantial benefit would result to himself. He therefore described the charms of Cahina in the most extravagant Oriental style. The Emir gloated over every word of the story. Had Askalon dreamed of the disaster and the ruin his ingenious and glowing description would, in the near future, cause his Queen and his country, he would have gladly torn his tongue out by the roots to prevent its utterance.

When Askalon finished his description, the Emir, with a longing, languid look in his eyes, uttered a deep sigh, and, turning toward an officer seated next him, he passionately exclaimed: "She must be surely a splendor—an houri of the seventh heaven, depicted by the Prophet."

The officer, though still young, was second in command; he merely shrugged his shoulders.

Turning again to Askalon, the Emir demanded: "What kind of a country is thy King's? What sort of people are his subjects, and what is their religion?"

In extravagant vein Askalon drew a picture of the beauty, fertility, wealth, and prosperity of the inhabitants, and of the rites and ceremonies of their religion. In answer to further questions, he described the various routes by which it could be reached from all directions.

"Askalon," said the Emir, "much pleased am I with the frankness of thine answer. I believe thou hast spoken the truth. We are not at war with thy country, and as thou freedst thyself from the accusations of my people, I shall hold thee prisoner no longer, but I command thee to leave Alexandria within twenty-four hours. Tell thy fair and learned mistress that it is to her gain to study the holy Koran, more than the works of pagan worship or ancient manuscripts treating of the black arts of magic."

As Amru spoke, he lifted up a copy of the Koran and placed it in Askalon's hands.

"Give this precious, sacred volume to thy mistress," he continued, "and tell her who sent it. Say that I am convinced that, when she has become familiar with the doctrines it contains, she will be anxious to become a proselyte to our faith. Say to her, when that hour comes, that I declared to thee my wish to take her for my bride; and that she shall remain in her own country and rule as its Queen. If she disdain my advice, or the offer of my hand, it may well be that some general more ruthless and exacting than myself, may be commissioned to invade her kingdom, and take her by force to his arms, as his concubine, or give her the

choice of embracing the Koran or dying by the sword. Now depart, but remember, we shall meet again, and thine own fate will depend upon thy proper execution of this commission."

The mere announcement that the powerful Moslem general intended to force marriage upon Cahina, to whose hand he himself aspired, was to Askalon like a dagger-thrust in his heart. Meekly he promised the hated Moslem obedience, while his lying tongue vowed it should remain forever silent. He thought not of the threatened danger to his native land, but solely of the possibility of interference with his personal plans. His soul was on fire at the danger, and the only thought clear to his bewildered mind was the necessity of immediate retreat.

Once outside the palace, Askalon was met by a sister of Nibamon. Guided by her, he soon reached the underground retreat, where he was welcomed by the chief priest and Nibamon. Both embraced him tenderly; marveled at his escape from the Moslems; expressed their sorrow because of the sufferings he had undergone, and provided food and a draught of strong wine, which gave him back some of his former energy.

Askalon was recounting his adventure to the priests, when he was interrupted by the entrance of spies, hurrying in with the information that the Emir regretted having allowed Askalon to depart, and had caused a search to be made for him. The necessity for immediate departure was therefore apparent, and new plans were at once arranged for the escape of Askalon and Nibamon from the city. Both donned disguises, while others made preparations for their escape.

All being ready, they quickly traversed the subterranean passages, on through the house, and into the street. There they mounted superb horses that awaited them, in charge of an Egyptian youth astride another horse. He was an alert novitiate of the Order, and had been selected as a guide for the fugitives. They started as the sun was setting, intending to reach the east gate at the exact hour of closing.

Despite their danger, Askalon could not help noticing that a large number of native Egyptians flitted by, and cast furtive glances in their direction as they passed. It struck him as so strange, that he inquired of the young guide the meaning of it. The youth smiled knowingly, shook his head significantly, and replied, "Thou wilt soon learn."

All went well until they reached the gate, where two armed sentinels were stationed. They were about to pass through the gate, unopposed by the soldiers, when a man dressed as a civilian stepped from behind one of the abutments of the arch, and grasping the bridle of Nibamon's horse, commanded the soldiers to seize the other horseman.—This man was one of the numerous Egyptian renegades, employed as spies by Amru.—He cried, "Who art thou? Methinks I know thy face."

"I am but a poor Jewish scribe following my master, who has just sold his merchandise in Alexandria, and is now returning to his home."

"Thou art a liar!" came the prompt response. "I know thee well. Thou art Nibamon, the wizard-priest. Soldiers!" he shouted, "seize this man and his companion; but kill them not!"

The spy grasped the leg of Nibamon; and the soldiers, seizing upon Askalon and the guide, by force attempted to pull them from the horses. The travelers resisted violently. They kicked and struggled, and with their heavy whips struck their assailants vigorous blows.

During the combat, the forms Askalon had observed flitting mysteriously past on the road, appeared upon the scene of action, and, by what must have been a concerted movement, tore the soldiers and spy bodily away from the horsemen and completely surrounded them, so that they could no longer reach Askalon's party. Some commanding voice in the crowd then shouted: "Fly, Nibamon, and may Ammon-Ra grant thee a safe journey."

Nibamon and his party awaited no further urging. With one bound the swift steed leaped through the gate upon the wide highway. The guards shouted lustily for help, and tried to cut their way through the mob, which struck at them with heavy sticks and short spears until the soldiers fell bleeding and stunned upon the pavement.

In the confusion of the mêlée, however, the spy wriggled his wiry form through the dense mass like a snake, and ran swiftly to the next post, where a reserve force of cavalry was stationed. He quickly informed the officer in command of the whole occurrence, and obtained, without delay, a horse for himself and six men, well mounted; he rushed forward in pursuit of the fugitives. Upon approach of the cavalry, the mob scattered in all directions. The spy and his troop soon found the trail of Askalon and his party, and, following it at a tremendous pace, they crept up on them. Like



THE ESCAPE OF THE QUEEN'S MESSENGERS FROM THE HORSE-GUARDS OF THE EMIR.

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the wind the trio whirled past horses and chariots and pedestrians, past villas, farms, and through villages. Their pursuers thundered on behind, surely decreasing the distance between them until they were near enough to launch spears at the flying fugitives.

To the priests it seemed they must surely be overtaken, when suddenly the young guide emitted a joyful cry of "We give thee, Ammon-Ra, ten-thousand thanks for thy protection;" which meant they had reached the sands of the vast Libyan desert, that no horse's hoof could tread. Just ahead of them they beheld three kneeling camels in charge of a Bedouin, ready for mounting. They spurred their jaded horses up to the camels, flung themselves out of the saddles, and leaped to the backs of the camels, the Arab and the guide bestriding the same beast. Swiftly the ships of the desert drew away from the floundering steeds of the soldiers. The fugitives turned, when at a safe distance, and with mock courtesy bade a last farewell to their pursuers.

During the journey to Mauritania, Askalon practised all his arts to win the confidence of Nibamon, with the view of making him useful in the schemes prompted by his ambition. The high-priest was a keen student of human nature and a born schemer and intriguer. He soon discovered that the vulnerable point in the character of Nibamon was his hunger for knowledge, for new and greater opportunity to study the lore of the ancients, and to add to this store by his own individual thought, research, and experiment. Askalon knew well that this new tutor of Cahina in his daily association with her, would be able to serve him to

great purpose. He knew too, that Nibamon had wondrous power in preparing subtle poisons. This latter phase of Nibamon's value, Askalon told himself, of course he would never call forth, but still—one never knew what might happen, and it would do no harm to be ready if need came.

In crafty phrases, Askalon dilated upon the wondrous possibilities for study he could open up for Nibamon, and that the latter would ever find in the high-priest his best friend. The guileless student had no suspicion of the motives of Askalon, who succeeded in getting him to make oath that he would do as the high-priest ordered in all things.

But the deepest-laid schemes of rogues are most frequently blasted by some natural event never considered in their crafty calculations. An unexpected state of things had arisen during the absence of Askalon;—the first news that greeted his astonished ears, on arrival at his home, was that the King had removed Cahina to the palace, and that a great embassy from the Emperor of Tingiana was now in the city, engaged in negotiating for the hand of the Princess in marriage with their sovereign.

*Chapter Three.*

# The Discomfiture of an Intriguer.

THE King with his usual friendly manner received Askalon. The drooping spirits of the high-priest revived: he felt assured that absence had not lessened his influence over his sovereign. The Egyptian priest was presented, and made a favorable impression upon the King, who ordered Askalon to provide suitable apartments in the palace, and to attend to all that was necessary for the comfort of this learned man, who was to hold the high position of instructor to the Princess.

"Now, my faithful Askalon," remarked the King, after Nibamon had availed himself of the Royal permission to retire, "it will be my pleasure to listen to the story of thy experience in Egypt."

Askalon now felt that the opportunity of his life had come—that golden hour in which he might acquire complete ascendency over the King, and thus realize the fond ambitions and dreams of his soul. He magnified a hundredfold the acts of cruelty of the Mohammedans, and the imminence of a disastrous invasion of the kingdom. In florid and exaggerated Eastern style, unhampered by loyalty to facts, he described in picturesque details the horrors and cruelties perpetrated by the Moslem army in Egypt; of thousands of captives

put to torture; of the ruthless demolition of temples; and of the fanatic destruction of the sacred gods. As to his own personal treatment, he prudently concealed the degrading punishment of the bastinado that he had received from the Mahometan soldiers. He impressed upon the King his acumen in realizing from the first the danger of an invasion of his country; he had employed his entire time while in Egypt, he declared, in closely watching the discipline of the Mahometan army, that he might bring valued information to his Royal master. He was happy to say, he went on, that in the name of friendship he had gained knowledge of the probable powers of the Moslems, and had examined thoroughly their method of warfare.

On finishing this statement, where every word was weighed for its effect, Askalon said that, Whatever might be his own wishes, he would gladly sacrifice them on the altar of his King and his country; he would be willing, therefore, to resign the office of high-priest, and to attach himself to the King's army, and become a priest-militant, acting in any capacity in which the knowledge and experience he had acquired of the Moslem army, strategy, and powers would prove most useful,—not for his own advancement, but for the salvation of his beloved country.

The King, after deliberating for some moments, answered: "Thou hast done well, Askalon. The knowledge and information thou hast gained are truly of vital importance to my kingdom. I am gratified to learn of thy patriotic resolve and of thy great sacrifice for thy country and its religion. Reluctantly, therefore, I accept thy present renunciation of the holy

office of high-priest, and do now appoint thee to train my soldiers in what thou hast learned in Egypt."

With a smile of triumph he could not disguise, Askalon thankfully accepted the powerful position offered him.

"O King," he then ventured to say, "if it be thy pleasure, I would have further speech with thee upon another important matter. I have heard that an embassy has arrived from the King of Tingiana with a view of obtaining thy daughter in marriage for the sovereign. May I inquire thine intention in reference to this most important affair?"

The King paced up and down the room, deep in thought, little knowing the personal interest of his counselor Askalon, who had just been so honored, and now wished to be further promoted to the position of son-in-law to the King. After a few moments of intense thought, as of one seeking a guiding thread through a maze, the King said:

"Before I answer, I should have thine opinion in regard to this marriage; and I give thee leave to speak frankly and unreservedly."

Askalon then began to unwind the tangled web of his plot; but in his endeavor to get out of the threads, he became entangled in its meshes. With dissimulation in his heart and hypocrisy on his tongue, but with an excellent imitation of an honest look in his eyes, he pondered the King's question, as if it were a matter of life and death, which he dare not decide without proper deliberation.

"My Lord, I do not think it wise," he said, after a moment of silence, "nor is it good policy for this

country, in the present state of affairs, with also the probability of Mahometan incursions, to grant the hand of its Princess to any person, however exalted his rank. If thou, our King, dost retain thy daughter, and the crisis arrives, then her hand may save thy throne, by an alliance with powerful allies, or she may in some way serve to conciliate thy formidable enemy.

"What dost thou mean?" said the King, with a perplexed expression. "Speak not like an oracle, darkening thy meaning with many words."

Then, to prevent this marriage, Askalon's subtle mind adroitly utilized the message that the Moslem general had charged him to deliver to Cahina. This he had not intended to divulge, but now he thought he would play upon the King's fears and artfully manipulate the truth to suit his purposes.

"Great King!" he resumed, "when I arrived at Alexandria, and discovered that its lawful rulers were overthrown, its priests dispersed, and the city in the hands of the Moslems, my soul was filled with gloom and despair. I resolved, after discovering Nibamon, to retrace my course homeward immediately. While preparing to do so, the soldiers of the Caliph appeared one day in my humble lodgings, and brought me at once before the Moslem general. In few words he told me his spies had informed him of my entrance into the city, and that I was the high-priest of your kingdom. He demanded information as to the nature of my business. I answered, I had visited Alexandria merely for a friendly visit to my brother-priests. He thereupon cursed and reviled our religion and its priests, calling us pagan dogs, fit only to be put to the

sword. My heart stood still when he threatened that the realms of my King should be his next ground of battle, and that the Moslem host would take, capture, and slay in the name of Allah and his prophet Mahomet, all who would not embrace the Koran. Be not excited with undue rage nor offended, my King, when I tell thee, as I must, of the sole condition prescribed to avert this dreadful calamity. He made me to understand he had heard, from countless sources, of the wondrous beauty, learning, and accomplishments of the Princess Cahina, whose fame has even passed the bounds of thy kingdom. He dares to desire your consent that she be converted to the Islam faith and that she become his wife—then would he forego the destruction of your kingdom, and, instead, accept from thee tribute in money."

The King's eyes kindled with rage and hatred as he listened; he could scarcely possess himself in patience to hear the end.

"Rather would I feel the crown torn from my head," he cried, "rather would I see Cahina burned alive in the embrace of Moloch; rather would I behold, like the accursed Nero, every city and hamlet within my sway razed to the ground by fire, even were I myself and all my subjects buried in the ruins, than give my daughter in marriage to this fanatical Islam robber."

Then, in a calmer voice, he continued: "I charge thee to repair at once to the Princess Cahina, and bid her, in my name, to prepare within reasonable time to accept the King of Tingiana as her husband." With these words he strode angrily out of the room.

Crestfallen, and swearing vengeance against the

King and the ruler of Tingiana, Askalon—his hopes blasted—falteringly sought Cahina. He found her installed within the splendid apartments of the former Queen, in regal state, surrounded by the daughters of the highest nobility of the land, attended also by a motley throng of foreign courtiers, attired in rich costume, resplendent with costly jewels and ornaments. Foremost among the foreigners he noticed a tall, slender youth, more gaily appareled than the others. His bearing was noble, his countenance handsome, but showing traces of a dissolute life. He seemed to be the favorite of the gay assemblage, and, at the moment the priest entered, he was creating mirth and laughter by some witty story. Askalon stood motionless on the threshold, frowning angrily upon the brilliant scene before him.

The moment the Princess observed him, she left her gay companions with a courtly excuse, and signaled Askalon to follow her into an adjoining room. She cordially greeted him and inquired as to the success of his quest.

In her presence the frown faded from Askalon's brow, and he assumed toward her his former friendly, paternal mien.

"My Royal Princess," he exclaimed, "let us thank the gods!—my undertaking was successful. I have undergone great hardship and suffering, yet it all seems as nothing to me now; for I am compensated by knowing I have secured for thee the wisest and most learned man in Egypt. His knowledge of the heavens is boundless. The birth and death of stars, their courses and distances, are all open to him. He can teach thee—

divinely gifted, my Princess, as thou art by the gods—to foretell future events by his grand astrology; and it will be his mighty privilege to lead thee by his wisdom into the ancient mysteries of the Egyptians.

Cahina's eyes sparkled with intense delight.

"How can I reward thee, my faithful Askalon, for this great blessing?"

"Princess," responded the thoroughly pleased high-priest, "thy sweet smile of gratitude amply rewards my humble services; yet would I crave a great boon at thy hand. I understand there is a deputation here from the sovereign of Tingiana, seeking the hand of thee, our Princess, in marriage. Tell thy faithful follower, if thou wilt so honor me by thy confidence, art thou favorably inclined toward this marriage?"

"Askalon," she answered, "the King has spoken to me in regard to it; but, at my solicitation, he has not urged an immediate decision. To please him and to gain further time, I have sought, from day to day, lavishly to entertain the members of the embassy with fêtes and dances, and to devise many other amusements. Such occupation leaves me no leisure for the calm deliberation of this marriage. To further delay this embassy, and to prevent my father from demanding a final answer, I purpose to be more deeply engrossed than ever during the next month by a great religious celebration, with all the ancient Phœnician rites. No one will dare disturb me in this; and the ambassadors must wait to receive my answer until it is over. If I be not ready then, my brain must conceive some further project to delay my answer."

"A very good plan, and worthy of my Princess,"

commented Askalon, with a nod of approval. "But, tell me, how didst thou discover the mighty secrets of the ancient Phœnicians?"

"Many an hour, Askalon," she responded, "during your absence, I spent in the library of our temple. I devised the scheme of the feast, and I ransacked the shelves for my purpose. At length a small, worn, and dust-covered manuscript was drawn out by the removal of another. I picked it up, almost unconsciously, and, examining it, I perceived beautiful illustrations of the wonders produced by fire and flame. But alas! it was written in some strange cipher. I tried unceasingly, but in vain, to discover the key to this cipher. One night my guardian spirit appeared, and in a word revealed to me the method of reading those ancient characters. Since then it has been my joy to delve into the mysteries of the Phœnician scrolls. Of course, such fascinating occupation prevented all thought of love or marriage. Knowledge is to me above all riches or power,—above the love of man. I love to know, but human passions I dread."

"Thou art a strange maiden, indeed," rejoined Askalon. "Tell me truly, hast thou, a great Princess, the inspiration and dream of thousands, never felt the passion of love?"

"Indeed I have," she answered frankly. "The gods above know how I loved my mother and how I love my father; and do I not love you, Askalon, my friend and guide?"

The priest interrupted in haste: "I am filled with joy to know that I am indeed loved by a maid so wise and beautiful; but know, Cahina," he continued with

fervor, "I have fondly loved thee since thou wert a child, and, like the sweet-scented rose, thou hast, under my care, burst into bloom. My love has followed thee through all thy progress, until, this very instant, Cahina, no longer can I conceal my great love for thee. Mother's and father's love are both in mine, my Princess, and I have indeed restrained my desire to take thee to my arms to hold forever. I am not young, but my frame and brain are not enervated by dissipation. I am made powerful by the fruits of my knowledge. My eye is keen. Surely, when thou dost ascend the throne of thy ancestors, thou wilt require an arm strong as steel to do thy bidding, and a vigorous and sagacious mind to give thee needed counsel. The crown must not be imperiled by a man of weak nerve or impaired intellect. Fear not if I tell thee a secret I learned during my abode in Alexandria: The Mohammedans have determined—after subjugating Egypt—to invade and conquer this land and to massacre all who do not adopt the Moslem faith. When this kingdom is conquered, thou wilt be the prize of their commander. Should this inevitable invasion be delayed till thou art Queen, canst thou blame thy servant that he should urge thee to mate thyself with one thou knowest capable and powerful to cope with thy formidable enemies, one who can frustrate their plots and avaricious designs upon thy crown and person? Therefore, O Princess, listen graciously to this my daring plea, made pardonable by my love." And he bowed humbly before her.

Cahina's eyes blazed with fury on hearing of the threatened invasion.

"Speak not to me of thy passion," she exclaimed,

wild with excitement. "Thine age would best comport with a father's tone, not the accents of a lover. If thou dost really love thy Princess and thy native land, stand thee not tamely here prating of thy love. Instantly bend thy faculties and thine energies to rouse every man, every woman, and every lisping child to the knowledge of the danger menacing their King and country. Let them in one dread phalanx rush forward, ready to shed their life's blood in repelling the Mohammedan robbers. Go; talk not of love; let me ponder alone in calmness this great crisis."

Askalon stood astounded at the sight of this young, dreamy, spiritual maiden exhibiting such fierce determination and vigorous intellect in this sudden emergency. As he turned to leave her presence, she spoke in milder accents:

"Stop! and hearken to my words. The man with whom I mate must be so great and so powerful that he shall avert the destruction of our beautiful land."

He humbly kissed her hand, bowed his head, and respectfully bade farewell.

Cahina's life henceforth was a busy one. Several hours a day she passed with her new preceptor, Nibamon the astrologer; the remainder she devoted to the entertainment of the Tingiana embassy and the other guests of the King, and in preparations for the great festival. Even at night, when all other inmates of the palace were asleep, lights gleamed in her chamber, where she sat till near dawn, engrossed in deciphering mysterious manuscripts.

Nibamon had been installed in the palace as the official mentor of the Princess. With the King's kind

permission, he had built upon the roof of the palace a high tower for his astronomical observations. When it was finished, he and the Princess, on the clear star-lit nights, repaired to the top. There the priest gradually unfolded to her the mystic science for the reading of the heavenly bodies and the foreordainments of the gods. During the balmy nights these two mysterious beings, clothed in white raiment, stood within the partly inclosed apex, in semi-obscured light, the stillness of death around them; one tall and gaunt, with arm outstretched and forefinger pointing to the starry heavens; the other, less tall, but of majestic stature, following eagerly with her luminous eyes that dimly outlined finger of the seer as he rapidly pointed out the different orbs in the firmament; and listening rapturously to his theorem of the prophetic attributes of the stars and planets.

Long before the date set for the grand fire-fête, Cahina became proficient in astral knowledge. She knew the influence of each ethereal body, and could read the aspects of every change for each day and hour, casting horoscopes with mathematical precision for man and nation; yet with great persistence she continued her labors on the Phœnician scroll.

Sometimes she called Nibamon to her aid in deciphering difficult portions. These he always rendered to her complete satisfaction.

When she had mastered about one-half of its mystic lore, and was ravenously yearning for further knowledge of the most ancient worshipers of fire, she found, alas! her progress completely barred. The other half was written in hieroglyphics wholly unknown to her,

not the cipher she had unraveled. In vexation and disappointment she summoned the astrologer.

"Nibamon," she exclaimed, pointing to the scroll, "I have gathered marvelous wisdom from that mystic tree of knowledge; but as I was about to cull, perhaps, its choicest fruit, the branches vanished and my hungry soul can no longer be satisfied. Examine for me this part of the manuscript, and if thou canst unfold the mysteries there hidden, I will grant thee any gift thou dost desire."

Long and earnestly did Nibamon gaze upon the secret scroll. At length, with sudden emphasis he cried in delight: "This is the most ancient of the Phœnician writings. Since the destruction of Alexandria's Library, I know not where another can be found. It is a treasure. In the wide world of learning, but four men can read its characters. I myself am one. It does, indeed, contain the most startling and wonderful operations of science, and thine ardent longing for further knowledge of the occult will be satisfied beyond thy most sanguine hopes."

Then, with the precision of a master, he translated to the Princess the wonderful miracles wrought two centuries before by a Phœnician priest of the fire-worshipers. From day to day they proceeded with their labors until the entire manuscript of cipher was reduced to a perfect system.

Though deeply engaged in study, Cahina had time to devote to Court-functions and to the preparations for the festival. Her labors were so ordered that she slighted none of her duties of State, giving frequent audiences to the ambassadors from Tingiana.

Their chief was a young man of excellent presence and dignified demeanor, and his handsome face wore always a pleasing expression. He employed every pretext in order to be near the Princess. At one time it was a forgotten word from his master in reference to marriage; at another, a desire on the part of his master to obtain her portrait. On one occasion, in the great audience-hall he entered, made obeisance to the King, and saluted the ambassadors. His eyes were then fixed on Cahina. At his solicitation she withdrew to one of the balconies overlooking the gardens, and from which point of observation could be seen a wide expanse of country. He clasped her hand within his own.

"Think me not presumptuous, O Princess," he said, "that I act thus. I am but the proxy and the representative of my sovereign; I act as he himself would act; and when I tell thee that mine eyes admire thy wondrous beauty, that my heart is enraptured with thy charms, that my mind and person—my soul itself—are enthralled with love of thee, do not frown on me in anger; I do but voice the sentiments of my august sovereign, expressed, it seemeth to me, feebly through my poor utterance."

"Indeed," replied Cahina, with seeming merriment on the tongue, yet with a twinkling eye that told of latent knowledge, "I doubt whether your sovereign be capable of imparting his dream of love so earnestly and warmly, and in such courtly phrase, as you have done in his behalf. Methinks that were he here in person, and in aught resembled you, with lips to plead his cause with passion like yours, I am not fully sure how I should answer him."

At this the youth appealed with greater fervor, fearing, as lovers ever do, to lose so fair a chance.

"My master is my superior far in form and beauty, and his tongue would more eloquently and passionately tell his ardent love for thee, most radiant Princess. Therefore, in his behalf I do beseech thee, most lovely Cahina, make him the proudest and happiest of lords. Return his deep and lasting love,—grant him thy fair hand in marriage."

With her hand clasped in his, he continued to gaze into her eyes with passion and expectancy:

"Oh, Cahina!" he exclaimed, "I love thee beyond all measure; I love thee! Hesitate n longer; say thou wilt be my wife! Then shall banish all other loves of earth, then will I consecrate my faith to thee, to thee only, until the gods shall claim my spirit."

Here Cahina sternly interrupted him: "Who's pleading now, Raschid, man or master? It seemeth like the King's tongue."

With sighs, and much abashed, he freed her hand. In subdued tone he replied:

"Know, wondrous Princess, that in my clime of splendid skies and glorious air the temper of the soul is highly wrought; whatever we speak, we feel. So I, though but a poor ambassador, perforce must be the King of Tingiana himself, though, alas! I cannot trench upon his rights. In his name, but with my voice and in all loyalty to him, I do beseech thee for immediate answer."

Cahina had determined on silence until the festivities were over, and, in order to gain further time, she resorted to coyness and arch raillery.

"Oh, I would thy master were here," said she, "to speak for himself as glowingly as thee."

Exultantly he again took her hand and pressed it, saying as he did so:

"My Princess, thou dost not yet know all. I——"

Here he stopped, as if suddenly shocked; he became greatly confused. He tried to continue, and failed. In his excitement he raised her hand to his lips, and then, fervently kissing it, made some incoherent excuse, and hurriedly left the hall.

The charm had acted as Cahina intended. His strange conduct would have aroused suspicion in a less searching mind. But to prove beyond all doubt that what she felt was certainty, she went to her chamber, and, summoning one of her maid-servants, she inquired: "Have you a lover among the followers of the Tingiana embassy?" On receiving the expected affirmative reply, she ordered the maid to procure from her lover a coin of his country. That night Cahina was the possessor of a new, bright coin of the kingdom of Tingiana, of late date. On one side appeared the profile of its sovereign,—the exact image of the proxy Raschid.

This strange maid of the East, though of almost masculine temperament, felt a feminine pride in having won the love and admiration of so unassuming a man and yet so great a sovereign. Closed as was her heart to love, averse as she was to marriage itself, this proposal engendered ambition in her soul. She must not hastily reject this brilliant union. Would it be wise for the mere pleasure of her scientific pursuits lightly to sacrifice the vast advantage she must gain from another

kingdom bowing before her, and hailing her as Queen? In this crisis she determined to get counsel from the heavens; she would consult the stars with Nibamon. She would ask him to cast the horoscope of her marital destiny, without revealing to him her discovery of Raschid's identity.

The following night, the sky being cloudless, she donned her white cloak, and, with a feminine pleasure and expectancy in peering into the future, she ascended the stairs to the eyrie of the tower. There she found Nibamon absorbed, as usual, in his astrologic researches.

"Nibamon," she said, "I come to you this night not as your pupil to study with you the luminous oracles of heaven, nor as a Princess to demand your services; I come simply as any ordinary maiden of the land who has a lover, saying to you, 'O great astrologer, cast the horoscope of my marriage—foretell its destinies.'"

To obtain information that he might communicate to Askalon, the seer craftily replied:

"How can I comply with your wish, O Princess, without seeing, or even knowing, who this lover is?"

"Nibamon," she rejoined, "you are adding the wisdom of a diplomat to your other accomplishments. However, I reluctantly bow to the inevitable if your divining stars need this information. Know, Nibamon, that I refer to no one in this kingdom. I speak of the sovereign of Tingiana, whose ambassador is even now at our own Court, seeking a bride for his master."

The seer regarded her face intently for a moment, as if trying to read her very soul. Then, rising, he drew from a curious casket certain instruments, and, taking a large sheet of parchment, he spread them carefully

upon a small bronze table in the center of the laboratory. Without a word of comment or explanation he began his operations, by gazing steadily at the luminous vaulted arch through a transparent crystal. He seemed to be waiting long and patiently to obtain the right ascension of some desired star, and would ever and anon try again. Then would he bring another orb into the field, with like result. So absorbed was he, that he did not seem conscious of the existence of the white-cloaked figure at his side.

At last, turning, he saw Cahina, and, with a suggestion of petulance in his tone, he made utterance:

"Princess, I am compelled to say that the presence of the person whose horoscope is read within the view of the caster, creates a disturbing element through the galaxy of stars. Even now, Venus, your birth-star, shows disquietude by most phenomenal scintillation, whose darts and rapid motions blur and confuse my eye. It may be late before I can fix an aspect; for the Zodiac is hardly above the horizon. Kindly withdraw, and let me work out this problem alone. To-morrow night at this hour I will tell you the result."

Cahina slowly left the tower. She felt no anger; but suspicion was aroused in her breast as to the astrologer's fidelity. She felt intuitively that it was not her presence, but the presence of some dominant thought in his mind, that disturbed his calculations.

Upon her departure, Nibamon did not continue his researches. He still remained motionless, silhouetted in the moonlight, resting his hand on the table, absorbed in meditation. He was struggling with his conscience, debating whether or not he should betray to

Askalon his generous and confiding mistress. Should he be false to the compact he made with him during the dreary journey through the desert? In his soul, as yet unsullied by treachery, the conflict was long and stormy,—so long that when he raised his head the first feeble rays of the sun had eclipsed the stars, and Cahina's promised chart remained undone. As the dismal gray of the early morning gradually vanished, and the full day became brighter and more cheerful, so fled Nibamon's conscientious scruples. Moral cowardice and perfidy, fearing and timorous in the dark hours, grew bold and assertive on the disappearance of night and the return of the brightness of day. The voice of conscience was stifled by fear, policy, and ambition.

Nibamon hastily restored the instruments to the casket, and repaired to Askalon's dwelling. Saluting Askalon, who looked up wonderingly, as if querying the reason for this early visit, Nibamon, in hurried phrases, told the high-priest of what had occurred the night before.

"Nibamon," said Askalon, "such marriage would defeat our every hope and aspiration. It cannot and must not be. It shall be frustrated at all hazards. Go to the palace where the embassy is lodged, there seek this youth, and, making whatever pretext seemeth best, arrange for me to have a private conference with him."

After a brief absence Nibamon returned, and reported that Raschid was promenading in the palace gardens; he would be glad to have Askalon join him there.

Askalon went to the gardens immediately, meditating the most tempting bribe to offer Raschid to betray his lord. He believed all men purchasable, and he

concluded that the price in this instance was the love Raschid bore Cahina. He determined to come quickly to the point when he met Raschid.

"The gods be with you this bright morning!" he cried, soon after. "I hope our exhilarating mountain-air has increased the native good humor of your heart, as I have a weighty matter to discuss with you. It has been whispered to me that you love the fairest maiden in the land. Nay! be not so excited, nor look so indignant; your secret with me is safe, and shall be unspoken to mortal man. I would be your friend; I would aid you in your passion for this maiden, of such exalted station that, without assistance, she is far beyond your humble reach."

Raschid, his noble face expressing astonishment and anger, looked fixedly at the minister. Suppressing his rage for the present, that he might the quicker sound the depths of the villainy of the other, he merely requested Askalon to unfold his plot.

"Let me tell you this, in all secrecy," said Askalon. "The King has an incurable malady, causing great weakness and loss of mental power. He cannot survive much longer. Even now, as Prime Minister, I regulate all the affairs of the government. At the King's death, Princess Cahina shall be Queen. The Princess is an inexperienced maid, whose only joy is in profound study and research, and therefore the administration of the realm remains to me, and I become absolute ruler. I, Askalon, will then be King,—King in power, if not in name. Do you not see that exigencies may then arise? It may well be Cahina will deem it wise to make me, in truth, absolute ruler of her kingdom,

by investing me as her consort with the title, King?" He drew himself erect.

Raschid's countenance became deathly pale on hearing this vile, perfidious declaration. But Askalon, too deeply engrossed in unfolding his schemes, and overwhelmingly absorbed in the rosy picture his imagination had conjured, did not notice the effect of his words.

"It is therefore," he continued, "of the utmost importance to me and my project that the marriage between Cahina and your King should be prevented. You are the only man that can accomplish this. Your King, as you know, has never seen our Princess. Send a report to your sovereign, saying that the story of Cahina's beauty is a dream,—that such reports must have come from the ravings of an insane man. Tell him she is old, ugly, and ungainly, possessing no grace of feature or of person. Say she is endowed with an irritable disposition—she is a virago beyond dispute. To crown the scheme and to assure success, send him some picture purporting to be a likeness of the Princess. I will furnish you one of a maid notorious for her lack of beauty—such a picture as will make your King congratulate himself on his escape. When he reads your report, and beholds this repulsive face, his inclination will turn to disgust, and he will desire no more to marry our Princess than he would to wed the lowest maid in his kingdom. As for you, I will not insult your pride and dignity by offering mere gold, high rank, or other worldly consideration. Your gain shall be greater—greater far than all these. Hearken to my words, Raschid, and let their intent fill your ardent soul. Know that when I shall have married

Cahina, this realm will be my all,—to do with as I will. My ambition gratified, I shall consider it my duty as a fond and indulgent husband to give my bride freedom—absolute freedom. I shall appoint you to the post of purser to the Queen. This office will require your presence near her at all times."

This monstrous proposition of the audacious minister almost paralyzed Raschid with rage and hatred. He was on the point of crushing Askalon as he would have crushed a viper. His Oriental cunning, however, suggested that he must dissemble, and meet villainy with assumed villainy. With great effort he therefore controlled his outraged feelings. Even a keener listener than Askalon might have discovered no trace of suppressed emotion in the calm, suave tones with which Raschid responded to this invitation to enter into a conspiracy where political ambition offered to cooperate with the god of love.

"Your proposition is rather startling," he declared. "So abruptly has it come to me that I require time for reflection. Rest assured, I shall not forget it; it shall receive proper consideration on my part, and in due season you shall have my answer."

*Chapter Four.*

## A King in Disguise.

FOR many days Askalon had no opportunity to speak with Raschid alone. All the officers of the kingdom were busily engaged making the feast in honor of the visiting embassy a memorable event, and Raschid was the center of many a happy group.

On the appointed day, as soon as the revelry became boisterous, Cahina withdrew to an adjoining chamber. Fatigued with excitement, she threw herself upon a divan. She closed her eyes—not to sleep, but to revel in ecstasy over her great triumph. Future greatness and glory were for her; glory great even for the daughter of a King.

Thus absorbed, she was suddenly conscious of steps in the ante-room, a curtain was pushed aside, and Raschid entered. Glowing with the effects of wine, and gladdened by song and dance, he had sought his beloved among the banqueters; but her seat was vacant. He hastened from the hall in search of her, and, with the aid of one of her tire-women,—inspired by a golden portrait of himself, commonly called the coin of the realm,—he was successful. The strong wines had given vivacity to his eye and emboldened his tongue. Losing his usual reserve, he seated himself beside her on the divan, and in a light, airy tone he spoke:

"Ah! at last I find you. My Queen with the radiant

countenance must leave the feast, and make this world for me devoid of light. I was happy in the midst of the gaiety; for you were there. But suddenly a saddening sense of loss came over my soul. I looked at your place, you had gone. I feared you were ill. With you absent, the feast had no charm for me, and I bore it till it became unendurable, then I flew away in search of you. I sought you, my Queen, throughout the palace."

Then, noticing the strange expression in Cahina's eyes, he recalled himself.

"My sovereign," he said, "would take it ill, O Princess, did I not thus assure you of his pride and joy at your success. What he would feel were he present, I do but speak. So identified have I been with him, that I am his voice. He knows the profundity of your learning, the grandeur of your character, and has seen, through my eyes, the beauty and elegance of your divine person. You possess all that can make you perfect and sublime—all virtues and beauties are made incarnate in you. You are the one woman to make my King happy forever. I must plead that you at once accept his offer, and raise me from earth to the realm of the gods."

"Nay, not so fast, hold but a moment!" Cahina remonstrated, an arch smile playing about her lips. "How can you so positively vouch for your sovereign's appreciation? Think you your King bold enough to ally himself with an enchantress—with one they call 'the sorceress'? Is there any man on earth so brave?"

"Here—here is the man!" he broke in, his passion at its height, while eagerly striving to grasp her hand. But she, divining his intent, calmly and coldly folded

her arms and looked with steady gaze into his eyes, as she said, with a trace of simulated indignation:

"Is my question then worthy of your satire? What mean you? Your answer answers nothing. You but say, 'Here is the man who represents the man.'"

Cahina paused for a moment, and then letting the sternness of her demeanor melt into a half-smile, she said in softer accents: "I pray you, look upon this coin of your country, and tell me whose profile that is."

He looked upon the coin abashed.

"This is the King of Tingiana," he falteringly replied.

She held the coin between her fingers, and examined it slowly. Then she glanced upon the handsome face of the ambassador. She mused for a time. Rising from the divan, she addressed him in earnest tones:

"Let no further act be performed in this useless farce. You are the King of Tingiana. Let Raschid die. I knew you to be Emperor throughout the whole play. Admit the power of the enchantress, and do not deny it, but let us confer without disguise and in your proper sphere."

The King, though disconcerted by the discovery, knelt before her, and, in impassioned language, declared his love in person.

"I came," he said, "to your father's Court in disguise, that I might convince myself that your renown for great beauty and deep learning did rise from truth. Further, I must add, my Princess, I came to win a consort for my throne, a wife for a loving husband. In my proper person I wished to know all concerning you. I cared not to depend upon the judgment of another,

hence I assumed the rôle of my own ambassador. And oh, Cahina! most richly have I gained by this innocent deception; yet do I humbly crave forgiveness. This deception befriended me, indeed. Beneath its wings I could delight, unknown, in glancing into those matchless eyes; I could gaze, unknown, upon those divinely noble features, modeled to enchant the heart, while commanding devotion and respect. Your superhuman mind, born with power to fathom the mysteries denied to ordinary mortals, can control man to your will, make heroes from cowards, and transform languid citizens into armies of patriots. Cahina, I love you for your beauty; I love you for all these divine attributes. I love even your occult powers, and my love dreads not lest you should place me within their mystic influence, —it knows it may ever safely rest in your wise custody. Your love and wisdom will direct my way to paths of glory. Your smile will reward all my toils; your recognition of my triumphs will be sweeter far than the plaudits of the multitude. My heart predicts that, with you, victory and prosperity will be assured to my land and its people. Without you, I feel that all my schemes of improvement will fail, and that I should lack even courage to confront the inevitable Moslem attacks. To win your love, I would yield my crown, bid farewell to pomp and glory, and with you as my wife would ask no further gift of fate, for all else would then seem but poor and worthless.

He rapturously seized her hands and gazed fondly into her eyes; but no responsive gleam told him he had moved her soul. He tried to read her thoughts, and soon an expression of such intense mental anguish and

hopeless sadness overspread his noble countenance that Cahina's cold heart at last was touched. Her eyes assumed a more tender expression.

"Would you wed a maid," she gently said, "with a vow upon her lips to dedicate her life to her country and its subjects and to the occult art and heavenly sciences? Would you mate with one chilled by the icy grasp of the distant ether where knowledge lies, who ne'er has felt one thrill of love? Yet, my lord, I frankly confess that your person and character have impressed me more than all others I have met. Hereafter, should I be Queen, and if for any reason of State it become necessary that I marry, I should prefer you above all other men."

He seized her hand and kissed it fervently in his almost hopeless passion. And he tried to explain to her that he was very grateful even for this far-off chance, when Cahina interrupted him.

"Return to your native land," she said. "At the end of a year and a day from this hour come back and claim my hand, unless, in the meantime, you receive from me tidings to the contrary."

The King looked perplexed—what could she mean? He could not read the riddle. He knew not whether he had cause for rejoicing or disappointment. But the encouraging and winsome smile of Cahina dispelled all doubt and anxiety.

"Princess," he joyously cried, "now have I no misgivings as to our union; for some good spirit whispers to my longing heart that you will never send the message that would blast my hopes and crush my soul. Cahina, do you know, that when we wed you shall learn

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THE CONCEALED PRIME MINISTER WATCHING THE PARTING OF THE ROYAL LOVERS.

to love me; for you are but a child in love—you dream not how intense it is with passion; and I will teach you all its chords, and will woo you until your love begins to blossom with all its priceless treasures."

Cahina naïvely suggested: "Do you possess some talisman or magic art to awaken love?"

"No talisman have I, dear Cahina, but the love that fills my soul. The ardor of my hunger for you will waken your heart as surely as echo answers to sound, or day follows night."

While the King and Cahina—he all unconscious of his surroundings, she with eyes fixed upon his—discoursed of love, neither observed the fierce eyes peering at them through a space between the curtains and the ceiling; for there Askalon had taken station when he saw Raschid searching for Cahina. He was not near enough to hear the conversation, but he could see the Emperor kiss the hand of Cahina several times. From their earnestness he judged they had reached an understanding. Implacable hatred filled his heart; he trembled with rage, and vowed deadly vengeance against the Emperor.

Raschid raised the curtain, on taking leave of Cahina. He held her hand in his for a moment, and then said in passionate tones, mingled with deep regret: "I depart with the rising sun. To say farewell for a year and a day seems beyond my powers. Love counts only seconds; for days and months are impossible to it—it understands them not. I fly from you like the slave, to do your bidding. May the gods bless and protect you until my quick return." And bending low, that he might touch her cheek, he whispered in her ear: "And

then by your side, my own Cahina, I shall be the happiest of mortals. Farewell, my noble Princess."

The King of Tingiana was gone.

The embassy departed. The kingdom resumed its normal condition, except that the illness of King Ibn assumed daily a more critical form, and the frequency of the attacks of vertigo compelled him to keep to his couch.

In the northern countries of Africa a superstition prevailed that was doubtless of Phœnician origin and ultimately became an article of religious faith—that in case of severe sickness, those priests should be summoned, who, besides being familiar with the duties of the altar, were also fully versed in enchantment and were able to cast out the evil spirit of disease. Only in the event of their failure to drive out the rebellious demons, were priests, familiar with healing by the use of earthly drugs, permitted to minister to the invalid.

This rule prevailed for all alike, and there could be no exception for the King. There appeared at the bedside of the King, therefore, when the monarch could no longer move about, a holy priest of supernatural powers, accompanied by an assistant. Four slaves of the temple followed with the consecrated Ark of Ammon, a symbol of mighty power, handed down from Phœnicia.

The priest found the King suffering from vertigo and nausea. With conjuration and mighty magic he discovered the cause of the disease, and solemnly declared that " the spirit of the King's father had entered into the King's brain and was revolving it with a ghostly finger through its very center." The reason, the priest

said, was that the father was displeased with his son's marriage to a Christian, the beautiful Constantia, and, also, that the King had lately been remiss in his religious duties.

The priest fell into a reverie, then suddenly dropped to his knees, and, with his face almost touching the floor, he fervently besought the aid of the god Moloch. After a time the priest declared that Moloch, through his lips, said that the only way to drive out the restless spirit from the King's brain, was to sacrifice on the altar of Melachee a female infant of the Christian faith; mix the blood with clay from the grave of Constantia, obtained at midnight when the moon was full, then mold it into a small image representing the fire divinity, which must be placed in a certain position under the Royal head.

The King, though shocked to hear this sanguinary prescription, dared not to oppose it openly. Therefore he suggested that, as the mere presence of the man of magic had benefited him greatly, the blood of a black kid be substituted for the blood of a Christian babe; and that if this failed, recourse could then be had to the original prescription.

When the blood of the black kid had been procured, the priest mixed it with wax, and kneaded it into a little red image. With a smile of exultation he showed the image to the King, and then placed it under the monarch's head, at the same time chanting a prayer.

He remained away for a day, to give the image ample time to overpower and cast out the demon from the King's body; but when he returned, the struggle had not been decided. The exorcist was chagrined, and

declared "that this was the most obstinate evil spirit he had ever dealt with." Some evil spirits, he explained, became very fond of their new habitation, and were loath to leave their prey, contesting the ground inch by inch with the opposing forces. And should the adept in magic succeed in driving the evil spirit from the head, they would seek another organ for their dwelling, and new magical remedies must be used to expel them.

The adept further declared that the most scientific method of driving away persistent spirits, was to persuade them that the victim was under the protection of several mighty divinities. Then the exorcist delivered a eulogy on the magic powers and virtues of all the King's divine champions. To terrify the evil spirit, he shouted in stentorian tones the separate magical virtues of the different parts of the King's body, claiming for them the divine charms possessed by the different parts of the bodies of the deities protecting the King. The magic virtues of the King's head and eyes were the virtues of the head of Moloch, penetrating into the realm of Hades; the virtues of his right eye were as those of Mithra, piercing the darkness; his left eye was like unto that of Rachim, which destroys.

After this terrible fulmination, due time was given for the evil spirits to get out, but they somehow seemed disinclined to accept the invitation to vacate their latest habitation.

Then the doctor of sorcery became wroth; he attacked the spirit hotly, shouting that the teeth of the King were the swords of Ahura-Mazda; his fingers were blue serpents of the fire-sun Adar; his loins the

two shining stars of Testar; his back and spine, of the strong Behram, and so on, until he reached the soles, or the Royal feet. Then the priest fell on his knees and fervently repeated the prayer for driving away evil spirits:

"I break, smite, and annihilate your body, ye, Deis and Druyas, sorcerers; through the Hom and Barsom and the righteous law, which had been taught by the creator Ormazd-Amen." This anathema concluded, the priest pronounced the demons disarmed.

Despite all this, the defiant evil spirits still remained in full possession on the following day. The King was delirious with fever. As a last resource, the wizard-priest declared that only the sacrifice of a female infant, a Christian, would save the monarch's life. Forthwith he sent slaves to procure the babe for sacrifice.

As the bloodthirsty slaves of the temple were rushing headlong from the door, they roughly jostled against Cahina, who was coming in to see her father.

"You dogs of slaves," she cried indignantly, "what mean you by this rough behavior? Stop instantly, and explain your unseeming haste, else will I have ye scourged to death!"

Crestfallen, they returned to the chamber with her; and the wizard-priest, realizing the situation, craftily interposed ere she could speak.

"Noble Princess, I despatched these slaves to seek an ingredient necessary for the due preparation of the only remedy that science leaves to us to save your father's life."

Cahina reminded the priest that she was one of those initiated in holy order. She demanded to know

what was to be done for the relief of the King. As the magician did not comply, Cahina ordered the slaves to remain where they were, and not to do the bidding of the priest.

The babble of voices aroused the King, and he inquired the cause of the discussion. Cahina hastened to the bedside and briefly told her father the circumstances, whereupon the monarch explained the sacrifice demanded by the priests. Cahina's horror was intense, but she dared not express her feelings, lest the support of all the officers of every temple in the land might be alienated from her when she became Queen. With adroitness and self-restraint she told the priest it would be as well to defer the application of the wondrous antidote, revealed by the gods, until she could speak with Nibamon, and ascertain the exact hour when preparation should be made. She gave to the wizard a well-filled purse of gold, whereupon he, much pleased with his reward, withdrew and bade his slaves follow.

Cahina immediately summoned Nibamon, who hastened to the sick-chamber of the King, accompanied by Askalon. When the Princess had explained the failure of the exorcist, the wise man smiled.

"The King is suffering from no serious illness," he remarked. "I safely declare I can restore your father, by normal means, to perfect health within a fortnight." Then his eyes chanced to turn on Askalon, who glanced at the seer with a look of deep meaning, and Nibamon hastily added: "Provided the disease remains as it now is, and no new complications arise." Cahina thanked Nibamon for his good omen, and the two men left the chamber, Askalon walking with measured tread.

Askalon told Nibamon to follow. He then walked straight to his own domicile and into the cabinet. Assuring himself that none of the slaves loitered near, he locked the door, and, with his features distorted by anger, confronted Nibamon.

"Why did you say you could heal, you ingrate hound," the ex-priest cried, "when you knew my interest? Have you no memory of the solemn oath made in the desert? Think you I shall permit you to break it?"

The timid seer, cowed by the menacing attitude of the other, meekly bowed his head.

Askalon was gratified at this evidence of the effectiveness of his words.

"'Tis well you remember the promise. Forget not you owe me gratitude, besides. Was it not I who rescued you from the clutches of the cruel Moslems, thirsting for your heart's blood? Do my bidding, and your reward shall be great. Unlimited means and facilities to pursue your mysterious researches shall be placed at your disposal. Are not these sufficient to induce you to do that which will be of great benefit, not only to the priesthood but to the kingdom?"

While Nibamon's attitude had been one of meek submission before the rage of Askalon, yet, as the wily ex-priest proceeded, the growing realization of the vital import of the Prime Minister's words made a marked change in the seer's appearance, and as Askalon concluded, with references to the assurances of chances for deeper study and learning, the eyes of the magician and astrologer sparkled with delight. The thought of the unlimited fields of mystic lore he could explore, made his heart bound with joy. His soul became pervaded

with the realization of his dream: to gain the means of building huge observatories by which to increase his knowledge of the heavenly bodies. Askalon interrupted the reverie.

"It is fortunate, indeed," said he, "that while you were assuring Cahina that you could restore her father's health, you caught my warning. Conditions adverse must arise to prevent the King's recovery, and these conditions must produce a fatal ending within one month. The welfare of the kingdom requires a strong hand on the helm of government. To achieve this end it is absolutely necessary that Cahina wed some powerful man within this realm, to aid and guide her when the Moslem invasion comes. Even should the King live, his power has waned. Disease has made him nervous; our country would be lost. With Cahina as Queen, her vast power will rouse all forces to drive the Arabians hence. Such is the situation, my wise and noble Nibamon, so it behooves us to lose not an hour. I shall not inquire into your methods, rest assured of that,—I desire not to know; but I say—within one month from this day Cahina must be Queen. If you fail, your life stands forfeit."

Askalon then turned, and left Nibamon to decide between conscience and ambition, without any fear of the result.

Nibamon was the first to enter the King's chamber on the following morning. He found there one of the watch of the previous night. The King slept.

Nibamon approached the bedside, and gazed sorrowfully at his unconscious victim. With a deep-drawn sigh he drew from a pouch, hanging at his side, a vial

filled with colorless liquid, and, with trembling hand and pallid face, he hastily poured its contents into a silver goblet, on a small table at the head of the bed. He directed the attendant to give the dose when the King awakened. Then he wandered from the room, as one in a dream, a hunted man's expression upon his long face. As he walked, he felt that every passer-by could read guilt in his eyes; he kept them cast down on the earth, and feared to raise his head until he reached his chamber. In great mental agony he threw himself upon a couch and covered his face with his hands, yielding to the reproaches and terror of his conscience, because of the cowardly act just committed—the destruction of so good, so kind, a King.

Nibamon was neither cruel nor depraved by nature. In his native country he had compounded poisons and delivered them to members of the priesthood at their request, without asking for what purpose they were to be used. Personally he had never been guilty of so foul a crime as administering a fatal dose. Buried in the studious solitude of his laboratory, in the vault of the temple of Serapis, he was ignorant of the intrigues of politics or statecraft, in which his associate priests were adepts. His life had been unsullied by sins such as were familiar to those around him. Now, for the first time, he had given poison with intent to kill, and he was seized with horror. He cursed, and bemoaned the fate that drove him to this cruel, benighted land. And yet hope came with his curses. He saw a means to ease his conscience. That night he would give the King an antidote to nullify the effect

of the murderous drug. His guilty conscience felt the soothing influence of this humane resolve—when suddenly Askalon appeared in the room.

Nibamon looked up, and instantly his heart quaked. His fear returned, and his hands shook when he beheld his evil genius standing before him. As if by magic his good resolves were instantly dissipated. For a moment he stood limp and speechless.

"Askalon," he managed to say feebly, after great effort, "thou art an early visitor."

The Prime Minister, having noticed the other's confusion, sneeringly remarked: "You look as if you had suffered from evil dreams last night, which still agitate you and affect your nerves."

The priest stood irresolute a moment, as if debating within himself: he swayed back and forth. With a sudden impulse he threw himself upon his knees before the implacable minister.

"Oh, Askalon!" he wailed piteously, "it is true thou hast saved my life, and I am grateful. In return, I will be thy slave. I will willingly toil for thee until the last breath leaves my body. I will do thy most loathsome bidding. I will do aught,—everything,—only not this—not this. Do not say I must repay thy kindness by destroying the life of my benefactor, my adopted sovereign. To do this my courage fails me; my soul shrinks from the deed. Rather would I be exposed to the fury of the bigoted Mohammedans and suffer their excruciating torture. I beseech thee, let me depart in peace for my native land."

As the miserable priest spoke, Askalon's lips curled in scorn, and his eyes glittered with rage and malice.

Spurning Nibamon with his foot, he cried, in a voice strident with anger:

"No, Egyptian dog! to your own land you shall not return. Here you shall remain and execute my commands, whether they accord with your effeminate nerves or not. Hark you! even now I hold your life doubly within the hollow of my hand. The grand priestly division of doctors, to which the magic caste belongs, has ordained your death, because you have interfered with their prerogative of curing the King by their magic art. My influence, and that alone, can restrain them from wreaking terrible vengeance upon you. Think you what rare delight in punishment they have designed for you?"

He folded his arms, and, with slow, triumphant stride, he approached the quivering Egyptian, still bowed low before him; into his ear he hissed:

"They will flay you alive, and give you time to live while they perform the slow torture, and gloat over you as you writhe in agony and shriek for mercy that you will never know. What say you?"

The blood of the wretched astrologer seemed to turn to ice in his veins; his hair stood on end with fright at the threat. None knew better than Nibamon the awful tortures inflicted by the priests upon victims of their rage. Already, in fancy, he could feel the man-butcher's keen, thin, cold blade beneath his quivering skin. His reason forsook him; he gave an agonized shriek, and crumpled as one lifeless at the feet of his master. There he lay for several moments.

Askalon gazed contemptuously at the fallen savant, and as return to consciousness was delayed, he kicked

the prostrate form. This not having the desired effect, he placed Nibamon upon a mat, chafed his hands, and sprinkled water upon his forehead. Soon Nibamon opened his eyes, and, beholding his tormentor, a shudder passed through him.

"Good Nibamon," hypocritically said the minister, "be not so alarmed. Think not of the torture by the occult priests. Again I ask, What will you do? Will you obey my behest?"

The wise man was crushed; overpowered by fear, cowardice, and the strong will of the Prime Minister. His mental forces had been shattered by the bombardment of the preceding hours; so, with true Oriental servility and cringing attitude, he seized the hem of Askalon's skirt and unctuously kissed it.

"May the light of thy nation's great gods shine on thee and give thee many years of fame," he muttered humbly, "and from now to the end of time, noble Askalon, thy slave stands ready to follow thy orders blindly, that thy desires may be fulfilled."

Then Nibamon informed Askalon as to what had been done that morning, and he described the manner in which the drug would operate. The faint smile of the minister showed that he was much pleased.

"Do not again lose courage," said he, in tones of approval. "So wise a man as you should be more brave. Remember, no harm can befall you while under my protection. Meanwhile, the doors of the secret library of the temple, with all its ancient scrolls and manuscripts and retorts for alchemy, are open to you. When you find your spirits drooping, repair thither and drink deeply of the fountains of science and mystery.

Such refreshing draughts will undoubtedly dispel all sorrowful reflections."

Nibamon, thereafter, repaired to the Royal chamber early each morning, and warily left the poison in the King's goblet. Each night he noted the effect.

As he entered the chamber one evening he found there assembled Askalon, many of the Court dignitaries, and Cahina. She was near her father's couch. After Nibamon had finished his examination of the sick man, all gazed anxiously into his face to find some assurance of hope; especially the Princess, weak and fatigued by anxiety and sleeplessness.

"The King, under the circumstances," said Nibamon, "is doing as well as can be expected, having been so near to death. So long as he becomes no worse, there is hope; he may be better. To-morrow I think there will be improvement."

On the next day the monarch was much improved. The fever was greatly abated, the eyes less glazed. He himself was overjoyed at his condition, and at once conversed with his daughter and his aged mother, whose faculties were still unimpaired. He tried to embrace them. He spoke hopeful words to his favorites, and expressed a conviction of his speedy recovery. All were highly encouraged by his cheerfulness and his seeming improvement, and the chamber again assumed the same aspect as when the King held his usual morning reception. Alas, Naomi! Alas, Cahina!

*Chapter Five.*

## The Fire-Worshipers' Festival.

AT the close of the thirtieth day, and near the hour fixed by Nibamon, a sudden intense pain aroused the King. By some subtle warning of nature he became conscious that this was a forerunner of death, and that the hour of his departure was near. He sent an attendant in haste to summon Naomi and Cahina, and his ministers.

With speed they reached the bedside of the dying monarch. The features of the King had changed so fearfully during the brief interval, the daughter failed to recognize her father, and the mother knew not her son. The courtiers looked aghast at the change that so short a time had wrought upon their beloved ruler.

The King was yet conscious, and he made frantic and ineffectual efforts to speak. He finally motioned to Cahina. She darted to his side, seized his hand and covered it with kisses. She placed her head close to his ear,—almost dead to sound,—and uttered endearing words, entreating him in an agony of passionate love to live and to get well for her sake.

The intensity of her emotion acted as a stimulant, and he revived for an instant. Again he made a terrible struggle to say something to her, but words would not come. Suddenly, by a last and supreme effort, he sat upright. Then he stretched forth his wasted

arms in menace and horror toward Nibamon, and, with finger pointing to his tongue, the King glared fiercely for a moment at the priest, and fell back—dead.

Cahina, with great self-control, was the first to regain composure. With a cloth she calmly and tenderly covered the face of the dead monarch. Turning to Askalon, her voice vibrant with great grief, yet in all dignity, she directed him to attend to such ceremonies of the temple as were ordained for the death of a reigning monarch, and then to come to her for further orders. Slowly and majestically she left the chamber.

Naomi, the dowager Queen and aged mother, seated herself upon the floor near the body of her son, and, covering her face with a shawl, swayed to and fro with rhythmic motion, crooning, in a wailing voice, the Jewish prayer for the dead.

As soon as the King's death was announced, the high-priest and the chief dignitaries of the land assembled in the reception hall of the palace, and there proclaimed Cahina "Queen of the Berber Kingdom."

On the day ordained by the laws of the temple, the Royal funeral, with all the superstitious rites and ceremonies of the pagan religion, aroused the country. In the archives of the kingdom were then set down the day and the hour that the monarch died, his birth and age, and the attestation of the physicians. Nibamon, the last of these in attendance on the Royal patient, certified that poison in the blood, engendered by the bursting of a cancerous tumor in the head, had killed the King. This announcement was credulously accepted. None of the Court party, least of all the Queen, suspected the astrologer of any wrong.

Not thus, however, did the priests of the magic circle receive the announcement. Their hatred of Nibamon, —for having interfered with their functions as exorcists,—made them alert and critical; they scanned every action of his while he performed any function near the King; they questioned every attendant closely, and they wove their web. It was they who prepared the body of their master for the funeral rites, and the examination made by them at that time convinced them that the death of the King had been caused by poison—not from an internal tumor, but poison administered directly to the King. To satisfy their hatred, they were eager to accuse Nibamon of the crime, and, through the power of the law, to wreak vengeance upon him. But Askalon held them in check. They therefore repressed their desire for present revenge, only deferring its execution. This, however, almost lost to Cahina her throne and her kingdom.

The Court being in mourning, no entertainments were held in the palace. The usual gaiety of the Royal household was replaced by an atmosphere of somber gloom. The time of the Queen was spent mainly with her councilors, she thus familiarizing herself with all that was going on in the kingdom. She continued Askalon as her Prime Minister, and permitted him to represent her in minor details, but all important matters she settled herself.

Here came the first restraint upon the overweening ambition of Askalon—the first cloud in the heavens of his hope. He had long before decided, within himself, that, when Cahina should become Queen, he would be the absolute ruler of the land. Now he wondered if he

had beguiled himself with false hopes. Had he mistaken the character of his Royal charge? It seemed impossible to him that he had misconceived that character, which had been created chiefly by himself. Had he formed, block by block, piece by piece, with the most assiduous toil and care, the great fabric of his future for naught? Had he not descended to trickery, treachery, and almost impossible acts, and even to murder itself to realize his glorious ambitions? Was he now to be balked by the independence and whim of a mere girl? Cahina he had always held to be a wise and studious maiden, consecrated to the encouragement of letters and to the cultivation of science and the arts within her realm. No part of his careful plans had foreseen or provided for this determination on the part of the Princess to hold the power of the government in her own firm hands. Notwithstanding the mysterious manifestations she had made, he had, when making his plan, judged her by the standard of all womankind—vain, timid, and vacillating. His own egotism had deluded him into the belief that he could obtain complete dominion over her mind, and that she would submissively abandon to his hands the reins of government. Never for a moment had he dreamed that this visionary maid possessed such indomitable resolution, dauntless courage, and inventive genius as she now expressed in his presence in the various councils of State.

Askalon was therefore forced to conclude that there were but two means by which his ambition to rule the land could be gratified. One was by having the priesthood raise the standard of rebellion, and thus overthrow

Cahina; the other, by marriage with her. He chose the latter as the more feasible. On favorable occasions he urged her, by clever hint and delicate suggestion—which she could understand without offense—to accept him as her consort: he had the strength to control both the priests and the people, and this any foreign King, with whom she might ally herself, could not hope to do.

To all these crafty proposals the Queen adopted a cajoling manner, saying that she was not yet ready to relinquish the privileges and freedom of a maiden Queen, and become subservient to the caprices of a husband; when she changed her mind, he would be the first to be informed. Sometimes she said, with seeming seriousness, that she was wedded to her kingdom.

Finally Askalon's restless ambition could brook no further delay. Seizing an occasion when they were alone, he told Cahina the time had come when it was necessary for him, as a dutiful minister, to inform her of the exact state of affairs in the kingdom.

"Hast thou not done so at all times, Askalon?" she asked him, a note of innocent surprise in her voice.

"Nay," responded he; "there are many things that I have hesitated to make thee familiar with, fearing lest knowledge of them might cause thee alarm and anxiety; these I fain would spare thee."

"Fear not, kind Askalon," was the Queen's calm and assuring rejoinder. "Thou hast my permission to speak plainly, and with frankness, that I may fully understand thee in all things that concern my future."

"Since your Majesty has been so kind as to permit me utmost freedom in speech," the Prime Minister continued, "and thou knowest that only my interest in

thee and in the welfare of thy kingdom forces me to speak to thee of these things, then will I say, with truth, that the priesthood and the people are angry because of thy lack of action. For many days the priests have met in the secret council-chamber of the temple, and but for my power with them would ere this have declared against thee by anathema. They say thy faith is not in the gods of the land, that thou art a disbeliever, as was Constantia, thy mother. In their anger they have said, further, that, had not Nibamon been brought here from Egypt at thy behest, the noble King would still be with the people, who loved him as a father. They charge Nibamon with having caused an evil spell to fall upon the King, which excited the ire of the gods. Already their discontent has spread from the temple to the people, and mutterings against even thee, their Queen, are heard daily among the populace. I have kept this knowledge from thee: I did not wish to cause thee alarm; but the time has now come when thou must know what dangers beset thee, that thy eyes may see the necessity for immediate action."

Cahina had listened intently as Askalon addressed her: and during his recital he had watched her closely to gauge the effect of his words. When he finished, she appeared to be in no wise disturbed.

"If thou hast known of these things, Askalon," she said to him, "thy ready brain must already have conceived a plan whereby this threatened danger may be averted. Fear not, I pray thee, to speak plainly."

"I have thus far been able to control the priests, and, through them, the people," responded Askalon, as he watched Cahina narrowly. "Had I the power of the

consort of the Queen, and full authority to place a strong hand on the government, then would there be no further danger, as the priests are anxious that I should be at the head of affairs in the kingdom. I may add, with truth, that they have commissioned me to bring them thy answer."

For a moment Cahina was absorbed in thought. Then she turned to Askalon and said:

"Tell the priests that within ninety days they shall have a definite answer from me. Also, make it known to the people that on the night that falls one month hence, they will witness such a festival of fire in honor of Moloch as they have never seen." She smiled in quiet confidence, which baffled Askalon.

The Prime Minister departed with mingled feelings of pleasure and wonder. He was not quite able to determine just what her real feelings were, and it irritated him. From the fact that he had no rivals at Court he felt sure that Cahina, in order to avoid disruption of the kingdom, and to continue as Queen, would consent to make him her consort. Yet was he filled with wonder at her decision to excite the passions of the people with a festival of fire, and was curious to learn what part she would play in it; for he well knew she had some deep purpose in what she did.

But the crafty Askalon was not aware that at the very moment he revolved these matters in his mind, a trusty courier, despatched by the Queen, was riding swiftly with a message to the King of Tingiana, summoning him to come and claim her as his bride.

Askalon had performed well his mission to arouse the interest of the people in the coming festival in honor of

Moloch. For days the populace, in the streets and in their homes, thought and talked of nothing else.

On the long-looked-for night, designated by Cahina, all habitations, whether the palaces of the mighty, the temples of the priests, the mansions of the rich, or the huts of the poor, were illuminated with brilliant lights. Lanterns were pendant from the peristyles and colonnades and the doors and windows of the abodes of wealth, and glaring flames rose from earthen vessels, suspended from the dwellings of the poor. The public thoroughfares appeared like enormous trails of fire, each rivaling the other to engender the loftiest flame.

But it was in the sacred grove, surrounding the temple of Moloch, that the chief splendors were realized. A multitude had early crowded to the spot, each component part in the black mass striving to gain advantage in the view. The assemblage that filled the enclosure was marked by an air of expectancy.

Now and then, where groups had formed while waiting for the ceremony to begin, there was much talking in whispers. The name of the Queen was pronounced at intervals, and each time it seemed to cause displeasure. This whispering became contagious, and spread rapidly. As the numbers increased, the crowd became bold. What before was merely whispered, was now spoken in loud tones. Wonder was openly expressed whether the Queen had sufficient faith in the gods to take an active part in the ceremonies. The priests had not forgotten the interruption by Cahina when Moloch claimed a bride to cause the drought to cease, and they had most craftily and surreptitiously paved the way for dethroning the Queen.

The conversation ceased, when, at last, Zemri, the chief priest, who had succeeded Askalon, appeared within the sacred enclosure. He was attired in rich garments, and was followed by a band of a hundred priestly musicians, wearing robes of white, with tiger skins fastened over their shoulders. On their heads they wore high pyramidal caps, ornamented at the apex with feathers spreading gracefully outward. The priestly band discoursed the weird music of the King of Fire; now loud, piercing, and terrible; again, soft and pleading. The players gave preference to selections that would rouse the sensual passions of the multitude.

The musicians were followed by the priests of the temple, robed in white. As they filed out the temple, they chanted sacred songs, swinging, as they went, silver lamps hung by golden chains from their girdles. Thus they marched round the outer edges of the square encircling the altar of Moloch. At regular distances raised altars, covered with red cloth, had been erected, and as the zealous priests marched, the chief priest detached a subordinate to preside at each altar, until only the musicians and the high-priest remained. These solemnly continued their march to the great altar of the fire-deity, that stood grand and gloomy in the darkness within the sacred grove.

On the platform of the smaller altars a brass image of Moloch, the fire-god, and of Malachee, the fire-goddess, rested on a grating of brass. Upon each grating also an animal rested,—a kid, sheep, or calf,—prepared for sacrificial rites. At the foot of the great altar a throne had been erected on a raised platform of red-cedar wood, covered with rich carpets of fiery hue. Innumerable

banners, emblazoned with priestly emblems of the various deities, were in motion in every direction. Flags fluttered gayly from the red-wood stanchions surrounding the throne. The dais was almost level with the ascent to Moloch's shrine, but on an elevation higher than that of the lesser deities, so that the priests and the Court could behold the entire multitude throughout the ceremonies.

When the high-priest and the musicians reached the steps leading to the throne, they remained motionless and silent. Then a loud flourish of trumpets burst upon the air, proclaiming the arrival of the Court.

The Queen and Askalon, riding side by side on jet-black Arab barbs, with milk-white trappings, emblematic of the priesthood, dashed up to the foot of the dais, and, dismounting, were conducted to the throne by the high-priest. Askalon was invested in his usual robes of State; but the peculiar and strange garment of Cahina caused a sensation throughout the assembled thousands. She was attired in the garb of a female magician, and the populace fell to wondering what it could possibly mean, until the rumor spread swiftly through the vast assemblage that the Queen would make a display of supernatural power.

With the Queen on the throne, and Askalon near, all was ready. Three loud trumpet-blasts announced the opening of the festival. Instantly from each grating, whereon rested the small fire-divinities, a great pillar of flame leaped high into the air.

At this terribly splendid and sacred belching forth of the god's loved flames, the mass of people grew hushed and motionless. The priests intoned in unison their

dolorous prayers to mighty Moloch, and the multitude joined in, swelling the sound to such an amplitude that it fluttered the leaves on the trees in the sacred grove. Each shrine soon became the base of a seething, roaring shaft of fire, making the sacred grove lustrous. The intense heat roasted the sacrificial animals on the gratings. The atmosphere was permeated with a mingled odor of godly incense and roasting cattle; the former was reserved for the spectators around the throne; the latter, savory to the multitude.

As the animals offered in oblation became sufficiently cooked, slaves of the temple cast each carcass upon low tables, covered with leaves, and ornamented with flowers, standing near the altars. Other slaves placed earthen jugs of native wines upon the various boards. Then the high-priest imploringly stretched his arms toward the gigantic and towering image of Moloch, and invoked the blessings of the god upon the Queen and her faithful subjects.

His invocations ended, all remained silent in prayer, and none moved until loud blasts on the trumpets were sounded; when, with a wild shout that could be heard for leagues afar, they rushed upon the loaded tables. Their shouts and cries and the babble of gossiping thousands, grew into such a volume of sound that it became deafening to the ear.

When the repast was ended, a murmur of expectation arose from the mass; at first low, like the sound of a distant wave, then loud, as it breaks upon the shore. Tense, uncontrollable excitement seized the people.

The murmur of the citizens was but the whispering of a coming wonder, as instanced in a fragment of

conversation between Haraet, who was a learned teacher of rhetoric, and his vivacious, bustling wife.

"Good wife," said the pedagogue, "what means all this excitement and mysterious whispering?"

"A born fool has a dull nose, and will never smell wisdom," she answered. "Have you not heard that the Queen shall perform ere midnight a wondrous miracle in the presence of the assembled Court and all her people?"

"If that be so, wife, then for a certainty I stir not hence; not if we tarry till dawn."

As the teacher of rhetoric spoke, slaves of the temple, under the direction of Nibamon, carried a large bronze basin—taken from a sacred fountain—up the steps of the altar of Moloch, and placed it in a position designated by the seer. This peculiar basin having been adjusted to the satisfaction of the wizard, the slaves, in single file, bore other sacred vessels, filled with water, up the stairs, and, in sight of the excited spectators, emptied them in rotation into the huge basin. Then they descended the altar-steps, re-filled the vessels, and again ascended and emptied them into the basin; and so continued until the basin was filled to the very brim with clear water.

All eyes followed the strange proceeding, and when it was finished there appeared before the people Cahina, clad in her mystic robe, which added greater enchantment to her glorious beauty. With firm and dignified step she approached the basin. The glare of hundreds of fitful flames threw into silhouette her majestic form. Occasionally the flames lost their force, and she then appeared in but vague and shadowy outline against the

white marble. She stood, with arms folded, like the Queen of Darkness, grand and magnificent, at times terrifying many of those who had cried loudest against her, now entranced by her beauty. Her eyes seemed to be fired with celestial light as she gazed on those who had dared to disparage her. Even the chief conspirators among the priests were affected.

She moved, and, stretching her arms upward to the heavens, she fixed her eyes on a distant star, muttering a prayer. When this was finished, she suddenly became all animation. Throwing her head back defiantly, she called out, "Nibamon, a torch!"

The seer placed a torch into her hand, and, in a tongue strange to those standing near enough to hear it, whispered to her a few words.

Cahina thrust the blazing end aloft, toward her divining star. She lowered it, poised it in her fingers for a moment as she gazed in triumph at the crowd, breathless now. With a quick dash of the torch she struck the liquid in the basin. Lo! the clear water of but an instant before, now arose a broad and lofty column of seething flame, increasing each moment in height and brilliancy until it burst into scattered forks, the ends seeming to snap against the distant luminary upon which Cahina gazed.

The spectators stood spellbound at the sight; the immense shaft of flame grew broader and brighter and rose higher; and three thin streams of pure white fire, more dazzling than the sun in their fierce intensity, spouted up in the center of the blazing column and showed through it. Then the mighty flame seemed spurred to greater effort, and, with an angry roar that

was deafening, soared upward until it seemed to ignite the very sky, and made every object, near and far, every form and lineament clear, and distinct to view; and as the wonder-stricken people watched this new manifestation, their faces blanched with fear, and a hoarse and terrified shout arose.

"Moloch himself has come!" they cried. The distant hills seemed to re-echo this thundering roar.

The doubters and the scoffers of Cahina then felt the faith and the power of their Queen; even the priests themselves succumbed to the dread fear that they and all the land would be destroyed in that furious blaze. Women fainted; and terror-stricken mothers vainly sought to calm their frightened children, clinging to their skirts. The strongest men were powerless to resist the spell; they could only look on Cahina, standing near the basin, her beautiful features aglow with triumph.

When the people no longer doubted that Moloch was angry, and about to annihilate them with his beloved fire, and when their excitement and terror had risen to a pitch where it became almost unbearable, Cahina looked out over the assemblage and smiled graciously. Then with but the handle of her torch, she touched the surface of the burning fluid; and to the new amazement of her subjects the threatening flame collapsed within itself instantly, and only a slight wreath of curling smoke remained.

In the sudden gloom, the awe-stricken multitude, recking not of caste or station, time or place, with one accord prostrated themselves upon the ground, and kissed the sacred earth in great humiliation, crying to

the mighty deity for pardon, mercy, and protection. As the altar-lamps were lighted, and cast fitful shadows through the sacred grove, the musical instruments pealed forth an anthem of praise of Melachee; the thousands of inspired worshipers leaped to their feet, carried away in a frenzy of superstitious enthusiasm at the miracles wrought by this queen, whom they doubted and condemned but a few hours before.

"Long live our Prophetess-Queen!" they shouted wildly, waving their hands aloft. "May Moloch preserve thee to do his further will!"

The immense throng crushed forward, singing around the throne, trying to reach the object of their adoration; and then, failing, kissed the ground her feet had trod. The very priests that had denounced her in secret council, struggled for a chance to touch her sacred vestment as she passed; but Cahina, knowing now that she was glorified before her people; that the tide had turned and all adverse criticism was forever set at rest, sought no further adulation. She simply raised her hands on high, as if invoking blessings upon their heads; then she disappeared within the temple.

*Chapter Six.*

# Revelry in the Palace.

WHEN Cahina's message was delivered to the King of Tingiana, he immediately selected a large escort of distinguished officers of his army and members of the nobility, in addition to priests, soldiers, musicians, and a host of slaves. Urged on by his love for her, he did not permit his retinue to waste a moment on the road, but made them rush to Constantine, Cahina's capital, like cavalry charging on the field of battle, until early one morning the peaceful citizens of the Berber capital were roused by the joyous flourish of trumpets, and, rushing to doors and windows, they beheld in wonder a brilliant cavalcade dashing through the streets, toward the towering palace.

Early as it was, the Queen, apprised of the approach of her lover, sent a detachment of her guards to escort the King's party to the Royal presence.

Later, the King and his officers were lodged in the best chambers in the palace.

When Cahina had made all her preparations for the important announcement to the realm, she summoned the members of her Court, and Askalon, the priests, and other dignitaries to appear that night in the great council-hall of the palace, to receive from their queen an important communication.

At the hour named, those summoned were in attend-

ance. There they found the Queen and the King of Tingiana, seated on thrones of polished ebony with arms and backs of burnished silver. The King was attired in the Royal robes of his country, and to those who saw her, the Queen appeared as the embodiment of majestic splendor and calm dignity.

Great was the astonishment of the members of the Court, and especially was Askalon agitated, when he beheld this gorgeous scene. Its meaning was divined by him instantly. Dismay, mingled with abject fear, seized upon him. He knew, then, that the Raschid to whom he had spoken and the King of Tingiana were one and the same person.

As Askalon realized the grievous error by which his ambition had overreached itself, Queen Cahina arose and announced to the assemblage that she had determined to contract marriage with the King of Tingiana. In noble and well-chosen words that expressed her exalted sentiments, she declared that the Berber kingdom was still the lord of both her soul and body, but that she believed her union with the King of Tingiana would be to the best interest of her subjects and for the general welfare of the realm, and that she was advised thereto by the priestly caste. Therefore, she announced, the marriage-feast would be held on a certain day within the week, and she bade the entire Court advance to the throne and make obeisance to its future King.

"The gods preserve our Queen, and may her consort live forever!" shouted the courtiers in delight, each good-naturedly vying with the other to be among the first to reach the Royal pair and to bow down and tender joy and happiness—all but Askalon.

He stood apart, overwhelmed with confusion; without hope, devoid even of his usual rage and hate; motionless, trembling, and broken by his error. He tried to avoid the notice of the Queen. But she, observing this, exclaimed: "Surely, my trusty Prime Minister does not hold aloof because of discontent at so brilliant an alliance? Come, and tell thy new lord that thou wilt serve him with the same loyalty and zeal that thou hast served me."

With all eyes turned upon him, Askalon made a supreme effort and became master of himself. In fawning attitude he approached the throne. Crouching low, with trembling fingers, he seized the hem of the King's robe, and, as he repeatedly pressed it to his lips, he murmured in muffled tones:

"The gods preserve the life of our new lord forever. May he be merciful to his slave, that recognized not his exalted rank when he first beheld him. Graciously may he forget the jesting and idle words then spoken by his slave, who swears by the sacred head of Moloch that he will serve him forever loyally and faithfully—even unto death."

The face of the King flushed with anger, and he contemptuously thrust Askalon aside with his foot.

"Out of my sight, false knave!" said he, "take thy oath of loyalty and hang it on a thorn-bush."

No disgrace could be more odious in the land than the taunt to hang one's expression of kindness on a thorn-bush. It was a public stigma recognized by all. To be spurned and reviled in the presence of the assembled Court, that had formerly hung upon his words, and had held him powerful with the gods and before

the Queen,—the loved student of his wondrous arts,—was more than he could bear. Even though the sycophantic courtiers were disturbed in spirit, knowing not the cause of the King's anger, and, fearing lest their turn come next, they instinctively shrank from the disgraced minister; while, with true Eastern servility, they continued to shout, "Long live our just and merciful lord."

Askalon—still crouched before the throne—slavishly tried to embrace the foot that had spurned him, muttering in so low a tone that the King alone could hear his cringing supplication:

"O light of the world, forgive those unmeaning words of thy servant. I will atone my error by any sacrifice in thy service, even by my life. Do not drive me hence, from the home of my forefathers, where, even with the wrongs that thou dost know, my usefulness is great. Oh, mighty King and Sovereign, make me thy veriest slave, thy——"

Before he could finish, the King pushed him so violently with his foot that the minister rolled off the steps of the throne to the floor, where he lay quite still for a moment, as if overwhelmed with grief. Then he slowly rose, and bowed his head upon his breast; with eyes cast down he shambled from the hall, shouting as he went: "Long live our mighty and just ruler."

With what seemed to him a hand of ice clutching at his heart, Askalon passed outside the palace gates. Seeking the least-frequented thoroughfares, he ran wildly and with great speed, like one possessed of demons, until he reached his home. At every leap he launched deep imprecations upon the head of the vile

tyrant from foreign lands. Again and again he vowed, with solemn oaths, a swift and deadly vengeance, and to that end he invoked the aid of all the gods of light and darkness.

Like a goaded beast within the cage, so raged Askalon in the narrow limits of his chamber. He tore his hair, struck his breast with powerful blows, and uttered the incoherent ravings of a maniac. Thus going over the horror of the scene, his violence and frenzy increased, until, at length, he fell in a spasm upon the floor. There he lay unconscious for hours. Aroused finally by loud and repeated blows upon the door, he managed to gather himself together and open it. Without, he found a messenger from the Court, who tendered an official document from the palace.

With eager hand Askalon tore it open. It bore the signature of Queen Cahina, and briefly stated that the King, for reasons that he did not divulge, had ordered that a decree of banishment be entered against Askalon; but that she had modified it to such an extent as to permit him to remain in the kingdom, but only if he kept within the limits of the temple-grounds. Askalon waved the document wildly above his head.

"The gods be praised!" he cried exultingly, as he drew himself erect, "that I am still permitted to remain in the land of my ancestors, and may still fulfil my oath of vengeance."

He obeyed the mandate strictly, and thus did not witness the marriage between Cahina and the King.

The Royal pair had planned to pass six months of each year at the capitals of their respective domains, and, at the request of the King, Cahina consented that

the first period should be spent in Tingis, the capital of Tingiana. Accordingly, as soon as the matters of State could be arranged, they departed, leaving Naomi as Queen-Regent, and a council of five principal officers to conduct the affairs of the kingdom.

In Tingis, splendid preparations were made for the reception of the King and Cahina, and as the Royal train appeared at the gates, they were met by all the dignitaries, and by the populace with shouts of rejoicing. The festivities were celebrated for many days. Plays expressive of the great event were performed in the amphitheaters, and splendid banquets were given at the palace and at the mansions of the rich.

Cahina's fame as a prophetess had preceded her appearance in the city. She had discerned the future advantages that would flow to her and her realm from the possession of this mysterious power, and she therefore assiduously encouraged the dissemination of this faith in her throughout the length and breadth of the joint-dominions of herself and consort. To a few chosen ones, at opportune times, she also gave slight exhibitions of her power, knowing full well that rumor would magnify it ere the story reached the masses. Once only during her first sojourn at the capital did she display her magical power in public.

During the celebration of the birthday of her husband, and within the gardens of the palace, a multitude had been feasting. Accordingly, owing to the lavish supply of wine, all were in a state of joyous exhilaration. The revel was at its height when, suddenly, every lamp within the lower palace was extinguished. The double doors of the grand entrance to the balcony were

then swung open, and, as they divided, Cahina appeared in the obscure light. She advanced slowly, with stately carriage, robed in flowing garments of scarlet, embossed with various gold emblems that scintillated with every movement. Upon her head a diadem of gold, completely encrusted with diamonds, threw a gleaming halo around her august brow. She seemed to tower to extraordinary height, and the multitude shouted in admiration when it beheld its resplendent Queen in her mystic robes.

Two gigantic Nubian slaves followed her, bearing between them a long slab of jet-black marble, encased in a gold frame. They placed the stone in a receiver, and then Nibamon, who had accompanied the Queen, approached, attired in the white garb of the Berber priesthood. He placed in Cahina's hand a light yellow rod, that glowed and sparkled in the darkness like a smoldering ember fanned by an intermittent breeze.

Cahina took the wand in her jeweled fingers, and with skill and rapidity traced numerous lines upon the black stone. The crowd gazed with curiosity intense as the Queen continued, occasionally dipping the rod into a silver bowl of water, held by Nibamon. When she had finished, she gazed with seeming awe at the rod; she then returned it to the sage, and took from him, in exchange, a small lamp of highly polished gold, covered with symbols of the fire-god and emitting a feeble flame. With this lamp she touched the surface of the marble. Instantly, in fiery outlines, appeared the figure of a man. Again she touched the marble with the lamp, and the outlines of the head seemed to shoot from the darkness of the stone into a bright blaze.

The wonder-stricken multitude strained its eyes incredulously; for there, where before had been only a piece of black marble, they beheld now in fiery outline the features and form of the King himself. All knew him, from glittering crown to sandaled feet. As they looked, the intensity and beauty of the likeness increased until the throng imagined the living King sat within the circle of crimson fire.

This concourse of people was composed of Christians, Arabs, Berbers, and Jews, yet all alike were roused to a great pitch of superstitious fervor. For a moment they stood motionless, then, like the hewn tree at the last stroke of the ax, they fell prostrate to the ground.

"Long live our Prophetess-Queen!" they shouted, "who knows all earth and the realms above! Long live our King! Preserve them from evil!"

As the multitude ceased, Cahina turned and took from Nibamon a black reed. With it she touched the surface of the marble, and the face and figure on the stone disappeared. This display of her powers, her beauty, and her stately carriage won the faith of these people, and welded the heterogenous elements into a unified body of idolizing adherents.

When the allotted six months had passed, Cahina and the King left Tingis for her home. They arrived there in due season, to learn that affairs had not progressed favorably during their absence. Rumors of war and invasion by Islam hordes had penetrated even the remote districts, inhabited by the fiercest of the mountain tribes, and had excited them to the verge of madness. Their turbulent spirits were beyond control. The thoughts of war had roused their natural inclina-

tion for blood and strife. Arrogantly they had demanded to be led forth to intercept the advancing followers of Mohammed. In the absence of Cahina, Naomi dared not comply with such requests, nor was a leader ready to conduct the campaign. Yet from over all the kingdom, from the mountains to the coast, arose the clamor for war.

Askalon, though disgraced, was still a priest, and from the temple stirred up the warlike spirit among the priestly caste. Through his instigation, they urged the Regent to appease the madness of the people, by seeming to make preparations for war. But Queen Naomi loved peace. She firmly stated to the priestly order that she would not begin the war. The clamorings from the mountains and the lowland sounded in wilder note. The demand of the priesthood increased in audacity. Bewildered, and not knowing what course to pursue, she, as the last resource, summoned Askalon, feeling he still had power with the priests and the people.

Naomi told the former Prime Minister that while she did not altogether trust him, she was anxious to have him exert his influence to restrain the people and to appease the priests until Queen Cahina returned.

Askalon pretended that the task was difficult; which brought out, as he had intended, promises of favor. Then he set to work, and soon the war-fever was less virulent; but there were evidences of it still when the Queen and King returned.

When Askalon learned of this important event, he sent for Nibamon, who, with fear and trepidation, came into his presence. The fallen minister, with neither preamble nor cajolery, ordered him to prepare at once a

poison that would produce instantaneous death, and would leave no trace. Nibamon shrank from him in dread, whereupon Askalon flew at him like a wild beast, and seized him by the throat; and, while throttling him with powerful hand, shouted that he would strangle him if he refused. The seer tried to plead for mercy, but Askalon only clutched his throat the tighter, and refused to hear a word.

"Say 'yes,'" he shouted, "or by the sacred flame of Moloch I will turn you over to the priestly magicians, and you will be flayed alive within the hour."

This awful threat had its desired effect.

With her usual vigor Cahina took measures to restore content and quietude within her realm. She sent for Zemri, the high-priest. When he appeared before her she fastened her dark eyes intently upon his. He felt a subtle influence stealing over him, and, though he tried to resist it, he could not escape the fascination of her gaze; he was powerless to withdraw from the mystic spell she cast over him. His arms fell to his side, his face became immobile. His lips parted, to murmur faintly: "Great Queen, I will do all that thou dost require of me."

"I have had a vision," she said to him, in solemn tones. "I beheld my army engaged in battle with the invading Moslem host. After tremendous slaughter of the Arabs, my forces routed the fanatics, and drove them from the land. Return, therefore, to the temple, and inform thy Order that war is inevitable. But know, also, that I am as yet unprepared, and, therefore, do not wish to make open preparations, that, becoming known to the Caliph might incite him to hasten his plans and

suddenly to hurl his legions against us. Therefore do I order thee, Zemri, as chief, so to direct the priesthood, that it shall hold the warlike fever in abeyance until such time as the god of battle commands me to be ready. Then will I unfurl my banner over the entire land, rouse all brave spirits to their allegiance, and bid defiance to the savage hosts."

Cahina, not content merely with pacifying the priests and the inhabitants of the valley, determined to climb the mountain-peaks in person, to quell the spirits of the fierce mountaineers. She proceeded with only a small retinue, unhampered by the pomp and etiquette of the Court. The King made no objection to her going; and she was not surprised.

Since their return to the Berber kingdom, the King had ceased to manifest any real interest in the affairs of her realm. He yielded to the gross luxuries of the table, the solace of the wine-cup, and to the blandishments of the fair-haired descendants of the Vandals,—his mode of life prior to the time he met Cahina. His days were beguiled in indolent pastimes with fawning courtiers. His nights were spent in feasting and revelry with dissolute flatterers of both sexes. The Queen was aware of his profligate life, yet she pretended ignorance of it; nor did she complain of the loss of his society. She only despised him for his weakness. She was, after all, more concerned with the glory of her country and her people,—her all-absorbing passion.

In due time Cahina and her small party were winding in and out the mountains, crossing many frail bridges and leaping lightly over fissures in the rock,—feats Cahina performed without a tremor, to the amazement

of her escort,—finally reaching Tehuda, the capital of the Berber settlement. Everywhere the Queen was received with reverence and enthusiasm, she at last reaching the douah of the Amgar, chief of the tribe. There she remained for two days, resting from the fatigue of the journey. During this period she sought assiduously by gifts and womanly kindness to win the confidence of the women of the tribe.

This she was at first unable to do, because of the great reverence in which they held her. They were mute in her presence, and would go no further than impulsively to seize part of her raiment and press it to their lips; and when Cahina urged the buxom wife of the Amgar to kiss her hand instead, the woman held back and said simply: "Such honor is not for me—it is too great." Finally the Queen placed about the neck of the other a heavy gold chain. Amazed at this act, all the women of the tribe gathered and invoked blessings upon the head of their beloved Queen.

Cahina next induced the Amgar to conduct her by night to a distant mountain-peak. In fear and trembling he went; for he fully believed that at night evil genii peopled the mountains. Cahina could overcome his fears only by burning magic fire, and she kept him near her by employing the influence that robbed those upon whom she exercised it of the will to resist.

Arrived on the mountain-peak, Cahina drew from a deep leathern pouch, hung at her side, a large parchment chart. This she spread upon a rock, and alternately scanned it and the heavens, after which she compared the results with a diagram, containing the table of the planetary houses. Then she closely inspected the

planetary system, and fell to measuring squares, angles, and circles, and therefrom drew a diagram of three regular polygons. With zest she intently watched the moon, and studied its relation to her star, and the twelve signs of the zodiac, drawn on another parchment. These researches were satisfactory.

"I thank thee, unerring stars," Cahina suddenly exclaimed, "for predicting the advent of the comet portending war."

She roused the Amgar, who had been sleeping under the spell cast upon him by the Queen, and then returned to the village.

On the following day she sent messengers to summon the chiefs of the various tribes to meet her on the tenth night after the appearance of the harvest moon.

They came, as requested, dashing into the village with their followers, forming a picturesque sight.

When they had assembled in the temple, Cahina appeared among them, and was received with enthusiastic greetings. To the centre she advanced, and, after invoking blessings of the god of war upon the assemblage, she told them, in impassioned tones and manner, grandly impressive, that the stars had revealed to her that war was inevitable.

"I know," she cried, "that the gods will vouchsafe a miracle this night to guide our future course. To behold this wonder, and to secure your implicit obedience to my will, I have summoned thee hither. Follow me to the mountain-peak. If within the starlit dome the gods display portents of success, then swear the sacred oath of fealty, or swear ye not at all."

In silence the chiefs followed the noble figure of their

Queen, arrayed in martial attire, to the top of the mountain. Cahina took a position at the summit, and, on her order. the chiefs formed a semi-circle round her, following her every movement with intense interest. She scanned the celestial firmament eagerly, and suddenly broke the silence by crying:

"The gods be thanked, the sign appears; the portent of war and victory is hurled by the gods into the heavens. Come closer, ye chiefs, and I will show ye this wondrous miracle."

As they approached her more closely, she pointed to the northern sky, where appeared Neptune's trident. There, high above the north star, appeared the outlines of a comet, with a long, fanlike tail. Their superstitious eyes beheld it, and they were frenzied by the sight. Their shouts of joy and exultation echoed and re-echoed among the hills, and they clamored to be led against the Moslems without further delay.

Cahina stood within the mad throng, calm and composed. When their fury was at its height, she drew her sword and held it aloft. They understood this act, significant of command, and, forming a circle round her, they drew their swords and held them aloft also, the blades scintillating with the moon's reflected light. Thus, with accord, they devoutly swore to follow blindly and unquestioningly the Queen's command, whatever it might be, wheresoever it might lead. Then they fell prostrate upon the ground and kissed her garment. Some of the more powerful chiefs were permitted to press their lips to her hand, when Cahina, satisfied with the success of her plan, ordered their return to their respective villages. Her uncouth admirers made a

litter of the branches of trees, in which they conveyed her in triumph to the home of the Amgar. After resting a day she sent a messenger to the King, notifying him that she was about to return.

When the Queen left Constantine to visit the Berber chiefs in the mountains, all restraining influence over her husband and the dissolute and designing courtiers departed with her. He was left free to his own devices. Though of noble mind, and energetic when necessity demanded, the King was naturally inclined to indolence and luxury. He was amiable and weak,—the natural product of the pernicious education at his father's Court, and his sole ocuepation was the search for continued pleasure and excitement. The fawning courtiers marked his weakness, and pandered to his desires. Cahina would not permit bacchanalian feasts, and her presence always held him within bounds; but the moment she had begun her journey to the mountains, life at the capital became a series of licentious revels.

The courtier whose peculiar talents were exercised in presiding over and arranging most of these carousals, was one Rezin, a young scion of one of the oldest and richest families in the kingdom. His father had been the largest cattle-breeder in the land, and at his death he left an immense fortune to Rezin, his only son. The young man quitted his home in the mountains, ventured into the city, and was at once assailed by its luxuries and vices. He was handsome and hardy, and for a time held out against the extravagant life of the capital. He fell an easy prey to the parasites, and his fortune soon dwindled away. At this point the King selected him as his Chamberlain, and it was his duty to furnish

amusement for the ruler. Naturally of good impulses, he tried several times to break away from the life he was leading; and he had almost succeeded when he was summoned by the King to accept the post of high honor, an order he dared not disobey.

Under Rezin's skilful management, life at the capital became one wild orgy. The example of the nobles was followed by the more humble, and the populace became demoralized. No news of this reached Cahina, then in the mountains with the Berbers. The priests again openly paraded the debauching rites of the goddess Astarte, prohibited by Cahina's strict decree, and the temple and grove devoted to the goddess were again the scene of ungodly mysteries, in which men and women took part.

For the entertainment of the King, Rezin had caused to be brought to the city a band of dancing women, led by a beautiful Greek who called herself Aspasia, after her famous predecessor in Athens. These dancing women quickly became the rage at the Court, and had the dissolute nobles at their feet. Amid scenes of riotous debauchery they were accustomed to auction themselves off to the highest bidder.

The King and the nobles were so taken up with these revels that they quite forgot that the Queen was about to return. One night they were engaged in their usual dissipation; the great banquet-hall of the palace resounded with hilarious shouts and laughter. Some of the dancers were seated on couches, surrounding the tables, beside their lovers. Others were pouring wine into the mouths of their admirers. Some of the men and women danced wildly until they fell from sheer



THE QUEEN'S UNEXPECTED RETURN FROM HER VISIT TO THE MOUNTAINEERS.

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exhaustion. Others, in a spirit of pure wantonness, hurled goblets against the wall and on the marble floors. Of all those present that drank deeply from the wine-cup only the King seemed subdued. He was sitting with his arms around Aspasia.

When the revelry was most furious and the uproar most deafening, the doors at one end of the hall swung back with a crash, and revealed—Cahina. In martial attire, and with glittering sword in hand, she stood before them like an avenging angel. She took in the scene at a glance; her beautiful features became transformed with rage. By a great effort she controlled herself, and stood perfectly still, uttering not a word.

The moment the revelers became aware of her presence the riotous scene underwent a magic change.

"The Queen!" they cried, and the tumult was hushed instantly,—for a moment no one moved, it was as if her glance had turned them to stone.

As the Queen watched, her anger grew. A threatening gleam appeared in her eyes, and she could control herself no longer.

"Degraded semblances of men," she cried, "how dare you defile the sanctity of my palace? Have your sensual souls just risen from the lower world, where shame and decency are blasted in the utterance? Oh, ye gods! have ye marked my fate, that I see the banquet-hall of my ancestors transformed into a bagnio? Who is the author of this licentious entertainment?"

The assemblage, already cowed, looked in mute significance in the direction of the King, to whom, seemingly, Cahina had not yet given attention. But none spoke, until finally Ahmed, one of the King's parasites,

hoping to gain favor and shield his master from odium, cried out that Rezin, the spendthrift and gambler, was the originator of the festivities. The others, quick to take the cue, and in order to screen the King and themselves, confirmed Ahmed's accusation, by shouting that Rezin alone had introduced the revel. By the Queen's order, Hafis, captain of her body-guard, seized the unfortunate Rezin.

The Chamberlain, feeling that his life would pay the penalty, made a bold effort to save it. As he was passing the Queen he fell upon his knees, and tried to kiss the lowest fold of her military mantle; but she drew back with horror and indignation, and told him not to dare contaminate her person with his vile touch.

"I plead not for mercy," the miserable Chamberlain cried; "I ask but for justice. Condemn me not with my defense unheard. Not even a murderer or a traitor in thy realm is led to execution without a fair testing of his guilt. Accord to me, noble Queen, like treatment, and then wilt thou hold me innocent of this; yet if thou and thy judges deem me guilty, then am I ready to pay the penalty, even with my life. Let not thine anger cloud the godlike attributes of justice and mercy that thou hast so often shown to those of thy subjects that have fallen under thy displeasure.

This earnest entreaty made a favorable impression upon the Queen, and she responded by saying that no subjects within her kingdom should ever be condemned unheard. She then ordered that he be removed, and that the guards should drive the dancers from the hall with the scabbards of their swords. This command was at once carried out. By further order of the Queen,

all of the dancing women were commanded to leave the city within six hours, and never to return.

After they had left the hall, the Queen ordered also all the revelers to depart. They were compelled to pass close to her, and as they did so she stung them with the lash of her tongue. When they had gone, and only the King and his slaves remained, Cahina walked majestically from the hall, without a glance at her crestfallen husband. As she went she murmured:

"This is the man who swore eternal love and devotion to me; and that is the love he meant. Such mockery of love confirms my previous belief. Real love can never be transferred. On whomsoever it descends, with him it will remain. To men it is but a fleeting fancy. Ah! such is not the love I once pictured to myself. In the King I expected at least the fidelity and respect due to my rank and person. But why should I vex myself? The gods destined me not for the happiness of wedded life. Wrong was I to allow ambition to override my aversion to marriage, and now with justice do I reap the fruits of my error. Never again will man's vows of loyalty, or promises of devotion, dupe me; never again will I permit my heart to throb with love."

Her presence quickly dispelled the disorder that had followed her absence from the Court; and the former decorum and ceremony were restored.

Cahina began quietly but energetically to make extensive preparations for war, prompted thereto by persistent reports of the threatened Moslem invasion. In these matters she never consulted the King, with whom her intercourse was ostensibly continued on the same courteous and friendly footing. She never, even

in a passing way, referred to his disgraceful behavior, nor reproached him, yet the members of the Court knew she regarded him with aversion. He chafed under the restraint imposed by her presence, and anxiously yearned for the allotted six months to pass, that he might return to his own beautiful city and gay companions. They were making preparations for the journey, when the Queen summoned the King and the ministers, and without preamble informed them that she was about to become a mother.

Paying no heed to the astonishment caused by her announcement, she addressed the King:

"For this reason I must request your Majesty to defer our return to your kingdom for a few weeks. It has been revealed to me, by the mystic messages of the stars last midnight, that I shall bear a son."

This news was greeted with cheers. The King kneeled, and humbly kissed her hand, his countenance radiant with pride and happiness. He begged forgiveness for his transgressions, and swore by all the gods that he would never again be guilty of such follies.

"Too late, too late," she softly replied. With stinging sarcasm she informed the assemblage that she would immediately repair, with her servants, to the Berber plateaus, as she desired that her son be born in the pure atmosphere of the mountains; there to be reared in simple, but wholesome, customs, and trained in vigorous and martial exercises, that he might become a pure and strong man and a brave warrior, not a libertine nor an effeminate courtier.

At early dawn the following day Cahina, with a small escort, two of her waiting women, and her old

nurse, deaf and decrepit with age, left the capital. The journey was accomplished in easy stages until they reached the narrow bridge spanning the chasm that led to the territory of the first of the Berber tribes. Here she ordered the soldiers back to the city. Then, with only her old nurse and two maids, she crossed the frail bridge, and was soon met by a large force of Berber warriors, who appeared to have expected her arrival, and received her with joyous shouts.

Her old friend, the Amgar, was the first to welcome her to his domain. Later she received an equally enthusiastic reception from the women in the village. She told them why she had come; and the warriors hailed this announcement as a tribute of distinction to their tribe, and acclaimed their fealty and devotion to the Queen. Cahina found that during her absence a douah had been prepared according to her instructions; she therefore, without delay, took possession, giving strict orders that none should be permitted to enter except the wife of the Amgar and the old nurse.

For the next four weeks Cahina remained in seclusion. At the end of that period a proclamation rang joyously through the Berber land—there was a male heir to the throne When, subsequently, the child was displayed to the adoring mountaineers, he was found to be a typical Berber in appearance, having the flaxen hair and the light blue eyes, so common among them, which were, without doubt, derived from their Vandal ancestors.

A fortnight after the birth of the child a ceremony in the temple marked the event. So important was the occasion deemed, that the statues of the gods

were all decked forth anew. Seven red oxen, without a single black or white hair, were sacrificed.

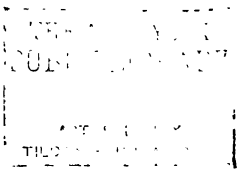
During the ceremonies Cahina was seated at the foot of the altar, holding the infant close to her. She was attired completely in the Berber costume. Her statuesque figure was enveloped in a crimson-cloth jacket, trimmed with silver braid; underneath, she wore a pale yellow vest, ornamented with gold braid, and a skirt of green material, embroidered with braid and covered with bright flowers, fastened round her waist by a scarf of green silk, trimmed with rows of golden cord.

At the conclusion of the ceremony she majestically ascended the steps, the infant in her arms. Then taking her position beside the high-priest, she informed the multitude that it was her desire to place the future King under their protection, that he might lead a righteous and unsullied life, with strength to resist the vices by which all crowned heads were beset. With an audible sigh, and her beautiful eyes dimmed with tears, she passed the infant into the hands of the high-priest, exclaiming in tremulous words:

"I now place in your sacred custody, as representative of the Berber tribes, part of myself—my life's blood—my future hope. I shall call thee to a strict account of thy guardianship. Fulfil my expressed wishes, and carry out thy trust with faithfulness, and the blessings of the gods and the prayers of a loving mother and generous Queen will be your reward; but should you prove false to my commands, and recreant to your trust, the curses of the gods of our country and the vengeance of an outraged mother and betrayed Queen shall be your fate,"



ENTRUSTING THE YOUNG KING TO THE CARE OF THE BERBER CHIEFTAINS.



The high-priest ceremoniously placed the infant upon the altar, which still reeked with the blood of the slaughtered animals. He stood before it, placed his left hand upon the head of the child, and raised his right hand aloft. All the Berber chieftains then solemnly marched up the altar-steps, and, unsheathing their swords, knelt round the altar. Placing their left hands upon the body of the child, and holding their naked swords on high, they remained kneeling, repeating after the high-priest a solemn oath to guard and protect their Queen's son as they would shield and defend their own flesh and blood, until claimed by his august mother. Cahina went from the temple to her temporary home, and announced that she would remain in seclusion until the time set for her return to Constantine.

On the third day of her retirement there arrived at the village a courier, covered with mud and dust, and almost spent with the fatigue and exhaustion of a swift journey. Admitted to the presence of the Queen without delay, he handed her a parchment, closed with the great seal of the Kingdom. She eagerly opened it, and her eyes devoured its brief contents. The parchment dropped from her hand; she fell back on her couch and gasped: "He is dead!"

When Cahina had become calm after this shock, she summoned the Amgar.

"Select an escort of five hundred of your bravest warriors," she commanded, "to accompany me to Constantine on the rising of to-morrow's sun."

*Chapter Seven.*

## Zobeide, the Mountain Beauty.

DURING the early part of the Queen's absence from the seat of government, the King faithfully discharged the duties devolving upon him; but the monotonous routine of mere official business soon tired him. His pleasure-loving soul constantly craved amusement and diversion, and he found it difficult to satisfy his inordinate longings. Rezin, the former dissolute companion of his Majesty, and likewise his mentor and guide in immorality, had been banished by the Queen to his home in the suburbs. There was no one to take his place, consequently, all avenues to the road of dissipation seemed closed to the King.

To find amusement, he had recourse to the learning and accomplishments of Nibamon. The seer related to him picturesque parts of the histories of Rome, Greece, and Egypt; but these tired him. In the writings of Ovid, however, the pleasure-craving King found many new suggestions for gratifying his corrupt tastes. When Nibamon, discovering the trend of his desires, read of the general depravity during the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Heliogabalus, Raschid's curiosity was aroused, and he eagerly demanded full details of the licentious orgies indulged in by these emperors and

their courtiers. Their grossness, their sensuality, their monstrous infamies, and their wanton acts of cruelty enlisted his rapt attention. When the category of their hideous vices was finished, he cynically remarked that "these profligate Cæsars could have taught the depraved despots of the East the refinement of excesses never dreamt of in their debauched Court."

The life and triumphs of brave, dashing, handsome Antony, the avenger of Julius Cæsar, made some impression upon the languid imagination of the King; but when Nibamon touched upon Antony's burning love and mad infatuation for Cleopatra, whose surpassing beauty and brilliant wit had enchained him, as they had previously fascinated the great Julius Cæsar, the King woke from his languor.

"How unfortunate indeed is it," he exclaimed impatiently, "that the world does not now contain a queen possessing such matchless beauty."

Then he listened still further, and heard how she had treacherously deserted Antony at the battle of Antium, by fleeing with her ships at the very hour when he might have snatched victory from Augustus; then he learned how Antony, despite her perfidy, had followed her to Egypt, abandoning country, wife, and friends to bask in the sunshine of her fatal love, and revel in luxury and riot until his final overthrow. When the King heard of the tragic death of Antony in the arms of her he had loved more than Rome, or fame, or even life itself, he exclaimed rapturously:

"It was a glorious death. I, too, could willingly lay down my life for such a mistress."

He asked Nibamon if he had sufficient power with his

divinities to discover the dwelling-place of the world's most beautiful woman,—some latter-day Cleopatra.

Nibamon was astounded and perplexed. If he refused, he would thereby incur the enmity of the King. If he did as the Royal profligate desired, he would be degraded in the sight of the Queen, should word come to her ears. He realized the danger of his position, and he pleaded for time. This the King granted.

Forthwith, Nibamon proceeded to the temple, where he consulted Askalon as to what should be done. The ex-Prime Minister, whose chief talent was in his power to convert all situations to his own advantage, was quick to offer a suggestion.

"Return to the King," was his order to Nibamon. "Tell him the stars have disclosed to you the existence of a maid of incomparable loveliness and grace, unexcelled in any land in this nether world; that in her presence all other feminine beauty seems but a mockery. Say to him that the stars do not reveal her name or place of birth, but that you are commanded to seek her in the eastern range of the mountains as the 'mountain beauty'; and that on the third night from the day you start she will appear before him in all her radiant beauty and splendor."

When Nibamon had departed, Askalon immediately sent a message to Zobeide, a supremely beautiful woman, who was the daughter of his deceased sister. Her home was in the village of Thapsa, where she was known as the "mountain beauty". Her father was a lawless Berber, who had permitted his daughter to grow up wild. Through the instrumentality of Askalon, she had received the benefits of an education and

had attained a knowledge of the world. As she grew into womanhood her ambitious eye wandered toward the great city. Thither she repaired; made easy conquests of members of the nobility, by reason of her beauty, and, accordingly, led a life of ease and luxury. She delighted in the pleasures and revelry of the gay capital; and, gayest of the gay, spent each year part of her time in the mountains. There, watchful to preserve her beauty, she sought in nature's panaceas—air, sunlight, and exercise—recovery from the effects of her late hours in the city.

Such was the woman Askalon now summoned. And she came immediately, meeting her uncle in the grounds of the temple. In plain, direct terms he explained what he wanted. He pointed out also that the King would overwhelm her with gold and jewels, which she could retain for herself; he would impose but one condition,—that when she had enslaved the King's heart, she should influence his Majesty to recall Askalon to the Court.

Her eyes sparkled with delight as she listened to his words, and she readily agreed to his proposal. She had long held bright hopes of fascinating a prince or a sovereign, and here was the opportunity. So, for two days the ambitious, unscrupulous pair, Zobeide and her uncle, planned how the heart of the King should best be ensnared.

As promised by Nibamon, during his talk with the King, Zobeide, on the night designated, accompanied him to the King's chamber. She was costumed as a priestly novitiate, and carried scrolls. The seer then left her alone in the room, when, throwing off the masquerade

of priestly cloak and turban, she appeared in the light and picturesque costume of her native mountains: a low cut, yellow vest of delicate web, a circular purple jacket, richly trimmed with gold, and without sleeves, planned to display to the best advantage her white, shapely arm and symmetrical neck. In addition, she wore a short, silver, brocaded skirt, reaching just below the knees, and around her waist a broad sash of gold lace, that fell gracefully to her naked ankles. Her feet were encased in tiny green slippers. Her beautiful hair was parted in the center, and tied back with a dainty golden loop.

Thus arrayed, she reclined in an attitude of easy, unconscious grace among rich cushions upon a couch, a radiant vision of womanly loveliness.

The King returned at midnight, flushed with wine,—now his chief solace. He moved toward the couch where Zobeide lay in the simulated sleep of sweet innocence. To him she seemed a slumbering Venus. He stood still, in mute astonishment, doubting his very eyes. He even imagined that his heated brain was deceiving him. He continued to gaze and to admire, until his soul was filled with delight and his mind with restless desire. His eyes dwelt upon the wavy golden hair, the slightly aquiline nose, the rose-tinted cheek, and the small, arched mouth, showing rows of pearly teeth. He filled a goblet with fiery wine, and drained it quickly. This inspired him with courage. He then approached the couch, and gently placed his hand upon the shoulder of the sleeper.

She awoke; and he saw two eyes of deep azure blue, brilliant as sapphires, looking at him innocently, yet

mischievously. Then he heard a rippling silvery laugh, followed by the musical tones of a low voice:

"Ah! I thought it was Nibamon."

He stood as one bewitched, overcome with delight. His eyes were too active for him to have thought of speech. He maintained his attitude so long that Zobeide said, while her eyes laughed into his:

"Why dost thou not speak? Tell me, sir, who thou art, and why thou art here, instead of Nibamon, whose coming I await?"

Zobeide was well aware that the man standing before her was the King, but she knew her part too well to give evidence of her knowledge. She was mistress of intrigue and dissimulation, and could play such a rôle as this to perfection.

"No matter who I am," the King managed to say, "you are a most superb creature. When I first beheld you, I feared you were a vision, and would vanish from my sight. I now thank the gods it was no chimera, and that the beautiful invader is real flesh and blood." As he spoke, he placed an arm round her neck, and imprinted a kiss upon her pouting lips.

With sinuous grace she quickly disengaged herself from his embrace, and sprang to her feet.

"Sir!" she cried, in simulated accents of indignation and injured innocence. "I know not in whose house I am; but my protector, Nibamon, bade me wait here until his return; he assured me I would be safe from harm in the house of his friend. If thou art that friend and the master of this house, surely thou dost treat Nibamon's guest with scant courtesy and respect."

The King had felt that this was the woman he had

commissioned Nibamon to discover; but her indignant protests against his advances somewhat shook his faith. With a gesture of annoyance—for he was then in no mood for a dialogue on the subject—he sounded a small gong on a table near at hand.

"Malik," he said, to the servant who appeared in an instant, "find the astrologer Nibamon, and bring him to me without a moment's delay."

The King again turned to Zobeide, who was now seemingly occupied with her toilet, and, to all appearances, thoroughly oblivious of his presence.

"What shall we do, lovely enchantress," gaily said the King, "to beguile the time until Nibamon's arrival? Come, name it."

"Pray, good sir," she naïvely replied, "depart, and leave me to occupy this room alone until Nibamon returns, when I shall take my departure with him."

"Nay, loveliest of women," he protested, with a persuasive smile "I cannot permit thee to appear and disappear like the wandering sunlight."

She rose, and made an effort to flee toward the door. He gently stayed her with his hand.

"Do not fly like an untamed bird from my presence. Be seated; no harm shall befall you."

With seeming reluctance she returned to the couch, without a word. After some moments of silence the King again attempted to embrace her, but she gently and firmly repulsed him.

"Well," he petulantly cried, "if you reject my advances, and will not converse with me, we can at least eat and drink to while away the time."

He struck the gong; and, upon the appearance of a

servant, he ordered a light but tempting repast. While this was forthcoming he paced the floor restlessly, as if in anger, until Zobeide, fearing that she had gone too far in her coyness, decided to make gradual advances, as far as she could consistently with her rôle of innocence.

"Sir," she said, "I hope I have given thee no offense; but as I expected to meet no stranger here, thy sudden appearance startled me. If Nibamon were present I should be pleased to sup with you."

"Now, my fair goddess," responded the King heartily, "such lips as yours were made by the gods but for kisses and concessions, not pouts and prohibitions. You talk as sweetly as you look. Permit me to be your friend, my beauty, and fill your mind with thoughts of me, so that there may be no room for even a memory of Nibamon."

Just then the repast was brought in. He took her by the hand, and, in courtly manner, led her to the table. At a signal from the King the servants withdrew.

Between the courses, the faithless husband of Cahina drained his goblet of rare wine, and, after playfully deriding his companion for her abstemiousness, he induced her to partake more freely of the silver goblet. To maintain appearances she had drunk sparingly, but, being a voluptuary, she required little persuasion, and soon threw off all restraint. The viands were delicious, and the King's wit brightened with the wine. He drank to her eyes, to her lips, to her form, and, as her resistance grew less, he became more bold and persistent in his declarations of love.

His adulation was incense to her, and her exultation at

the conquest she had made was complete. Her true nature asserted itself. As her head lay on his shoulder, she told him that no man had ever before made so deep an impression upon her heart; she would make full amends, she said, for her unkind denials.

Then the King uttered honeyed words of devotion, broken only by melting songs of love, softly warbled by Zobeide. Thus they passed the hours, and swore eternal love for each other. Incidentally, Zobeide, with the artful cunning that wine alone inspires, induced the King to reveal his identity.

Mikas, the King's body-servant, found both asleep beside the table when he entered in the morning.

During the day Zobeide was installed in the palace in splendid apartments, and many handsome costumes were sent to her. And when the King beheld her arrayed in the rich garments and adorned with the jewels he had given her, he was more entranced than ever.

In the days that followed, he was so enslaved by her charms that he abandoned the affairs of State for the seductive pleasures of her company. He neglected the services at the temple, attended no games, and failed to appear at the public festivals. His people saw him only when he dashed through the streets in his gilded chariot, his mistress seated at his side.

In time, her domination over his heart and will became absolute and complete. His eyes saw only with her vision; his mind discriminated only through her judgment. Her every caprice, no matter how whimsical and unreasonable, was instantly gratified.

All the time there was before her, like a skeleton at a feast, the memory of the sacred compact she had made

with the exacting and inexorable Askalon. Warily, while relating events of her childhood, she mentioned the priest's name; she spoke of him casually as a friend of her father. At one time, when the King was in a particularly gracious mood, she archly asked to be permitted to invite her father's old friend to visit her at the palace. The King instantly became cold and distant in manner, and her request received a prompt and brusque refusal. However, she was not deterred by this rebuff; during one of their convivial little dinners she again ventured to broach the dangerous subject—he was in the mood to promise anything.

"My love for thee is so great," he said, as he held her in his arms, "that I would make any sacrifice for thee—even life itself."

"If that be so," said Zobeide, thinking her opportunity had come, "I will test thy devotion. I will see if thy words be mere words, or if thou dost really love me."

"I can refuse thee no boon, my beautiful one, no matter how great a sacrifice it may involve," responded the King gallantly.

She pressed a cheek against his, and said archly: "Wouldst thou make so great a sacrifice, my heart's treasure, in token of our love that thou couldst become reconciled with Askalon?"

As if stung by an adder the King sprang to his feet and thrust her from him. The fumes of wine were dispelled. For a moment he stood before her, cold, stern, and composed.

"So!" he cried, in tones of galling bitterness. "Tricked and betrayed by her who was the sunlight of my life, the source of my happiness, the repository of

my confidence. Never shall I love, never shall I confide in, another woman."

Her cheeks blanched. She realized she had overshot the mark. He was about to cast her off in anger and resentment, and she feared to lose him forever. He was the first in the long series of her noble lovers to kindle the spark of love in her breast, and she loved him with all the strength and ardor of her fickle heart. Alas! she thought, having felt the thrill of love, was she now to lose its delicious ecstasy forever? Was her happiness to be sacrificed on the altar of Askalon's ambition? Swiftly she resolved to retrieve her error. She hastened to him, her eyes glowing with love, and threw her arms about his neck. His sternness relaxed for a moment under the spell of her caresses.

"Forgive me, my generous lord," she said pleadingly, in soft and contrite voice, "I meant not to offend thee. It was but a jest. Let us not become estranged because of my idle words. My life will be sunless without thy love. Cast me not aside, else will I die of grief at thy feet. Drive me not away——"

Before she could finish the sentence, her supple form swayed and trembled, and she was about to fall at his feet in a swoon, when he caught her in his arms.

As he looked upon her his wrath vanished. He pressed her to his heart, and kissed her pallid cheek, murmuring words of love and forgiveness. She quickly revived, and they were reconciled; he became more infatuated than before. They continued to revel in their isolated world of luxury and mutual love.

She nevèr again ventured the subject of Askalon to her Royal lover. She deemed it her duty, however, to

relate the entire occurrence to Nibamon at the first opportunity; and he, faithful servant that he was, reported in turn to Askalon. The ex-Prime Minister flew into a furious rage. "All is lost," he cried out in his bitterness and chagrin. "The foreign dog will not relent. The work of the past and the fondest hopes of my future life are utterly blasted unless the gods will come to my assistance."

Then suddenly his eyes twinkled under the inspiration of a new idea, and he told Nibamon to hasten back to Zobeide and to tell her that the Queen was returning, and that the King's mistress would soon be cast off.

Upon doing as he was ordered, Nibamon found an opportunity to speak alone with Zobeide. While his soul rebelled against the part he was playing, he knew he was in the toils of an exacting and relentless master, and he dared not disobey; so he forced himself to deliver the message as commanded by Askalon.

Zobeide's cheeks blanched with fear and indignation as she listened to Nibamon's words.

"It is impossible," she cried, as the tears welled in her eyes. "He could not be so heartless as to cast me aside in such cruel manner. No, it must not be," she added, in great anguish. "I cannot endure such shame and indignity. I would do anything to avert such an awful fate. Cannot you, good Nibamon, who know all things, devise some way to aid me?"

He suggested that when the necessity for action arose, she should consult her uncle, who was a man of infinite resources.

Zobeide determined to test the King at the earliest opportunity. And this came within the hour.

"Sir," she said to him, when she thought he was in the proper mood, "it is rumored that the Queen is on her way to the city, and that when she returns you will desert me, and banish me from the kingdom."

The King had heard nothing of the Queen's intention to return, nor had he any desire to sever his relation with Zobeide, yet, by some strange fatality, he seized the occasion to test her love for him. He dissembled the love that filled his heart, and in cold and guarded manner he replied:

"I also have heard rumors concerning the Queen's return, and you know that sovereigns are often compelled to sacrifice their dearest personal desires for political reasons and the peace and quietude of the realm; but, until then," in softer tones, "my dear Zobeide, we can still continue our delightful existence."

"Be it so, my lord," she answered, with resignation that seemed almost despair, fully believing that the message sent to her by Askalon was a truth.

That evening early she repaired to the temple-grounds, where she met Askalon, and besought his aid and counsel, that she might not be cast off altogether by her Royal lover. The ex-Prime Minister almost shouted for joy at this happy outcome of his schemes; at this long-looked-for opportunity to be revenged on the hated foreigner. He told her to remain where she was until his return; and he hurried to the library, where he found Nibamon. From the seer he secured a vial of quick-acting poison, prepared by Nibamon at his order. He returned quickly to Zobeide.

"This which I give you is a powerful love-philter," he said, handing her the vial: "no one knows how to

prepare it except Nibamon, the astrologer. With this philter you are prepared to overcome the present situation; for, properly administered, it will assure you of the King's undiminished affection, despite all rivalry and opposition. This philter has worked miracles in Egypt, where only the wealth and power of monarchs and princes could obtain it."

"Let me have it," she cried pleadingly, holding out her hand. "I will give it to him this very night, that I may not lose his love for more than a few hours."

"This philter I will give you on one condition," said Askalon: "you must promise not to reveal my name nor that of Nibamon as having knowledge of it. It is to my interest still to have the King enamored of you; for, through you alone can I be restored to favor at Court. Take it, and may the goddess of love prosper you, and give you success. But one word more ere you depart. According to the directions given me by Nibamon, you must pour the sacred drops into a goblet of wine at the first moment of midnight."

Zobeide made the required promise, concealed the vial in her clothing, and returned to the palace to pass the evening with the King. Her heart was more gay, and her laugh had a merrier ring in it, when she met him; for she felt that after midnight he would still be her devoted lover, no matter what happened.

They reveled in the happiness of their love without referring to what had passed between them during the day. The eyes of the King became heavy with wine, and he sat down on the edge of the couch. The time was now close to midnight.

Zobeide noted the hour, and she thanked the gods

that the favorable moment had arrived when she would secure his love forever; yet, in her bright visions of the future, somber colors appeared, and she had a strange premonition of impending evil. When the King requested her to fetch him a goblet of wine, she approached the table with paling cheek and faltering step, and her hands shook as she filled the silver goblet with wine for her lover.

Nervously she produced the small vial from her gauzy attire, and quickly poured its contents into the ruby wine; and, while she implicitly relied upon the honesty of her uncle and Nibamon, she was unable to account for a vague feeling of dread that kept obtruding upon her. She paused a moment to regain composure, and, in an effort to overcome such weakness, she spasmodically seized the cup and quickly carried it to the King, who arose from the couch to receive the wine. Then she said, in her customary silvery tones, a sweet smile upon her lips:

"Drink, my sire and generous friend, and may it bring thee sweet and dreamless repose—even though cruel necessities of State decree it to be the last cup my willing hands are permitted to proffer thee."

He seized the cup, held it high above his head, with mirth sparkling in his eyes.

"A toast!" he laughingly cried. "Fill a goblet of wine, and drink with me."

She did so, and held the goblet aloft,—close to that in the hand of the King.

"I drink," he cried rapturously, "to our undying love, whose ardor no earthly instrument can cool, whose sacred flame no heavenly power can extinguish."

He paused, while his grandiloquent phrases exalted her hopes. Then he cried merrily: "I did but jest to-day, my charming Zobeide, when I told thee we might be compelled to separate. I simply wished to test thy love and constancy. I never meant, even at the Queen's demand, to separate from the only woman who ever held my love thus long in bondage."

Instantly, the illusory joy of her superstitious soul was dashed from its vast height. He really loved her, loved her ardently and sincerely. She now saw it was not necessary to have recourse to a love-philter. Her eyes betrayed the joy she felt as he lowered the cup.

"Come," he said tenderly, "we must drink together to the toast that is to unite us forever."

Even now, in the midst of her joy, she could not shake off the haunting fear that a great evil was about to befall her. Her feelings were so wrought she could have shrieked aloud, yet her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth; as he put the goblet to his lips, instinct told her to warn him not to drink; and, in pursuance of her resolve, she summoned all her resolution, and cried out: "Drink,"—but before she could complete the sentence, and utter the word "not," the King quaffed the wine, and, while yet in the act of drinking, the half-empty cup dropped from his hand upon the tiled floor, dying it with a huge crimson stain.

At the same instant he gasped convulsively, clutched at his throat, tottered, and fell dead upon the floor.

It happened so quickly that Zobeide stood quite still, dazed by the suddenness with which death had taken the man before her. She could not believe he was dead; he had fallen into a sleep, from which he would awaken

with a greater and more consuming love for her. So she sat on the couch, and took his head upon her lap, and stroked his forehead caressingly.

There they found her in the morning, eyes fixed and staring, her hand moving mechanically over his face with a soft, caressing motion. When they raised an outcry, she said to them quietly:

"Refrain from thy disturbance; for my lover sleeps, and will awaken shortly. Then I will summon thee."

The guards were compelled to resort to force to drag her from the chamber.

She was given into the custody of the priests. While under guard, she raved over the scenes of the night.

"I did not know," she shouted, "I did not know. Nibamon it was who made the love-philter with which I killed my lover."

Hearing this, the fury of the priests was boundless, and they immediately despatched slaves to conduct the seer to their presence. Vainly they searched his dwelling and every place in the city where they thought he might conceal himself. The high-priest fumed in rage at their failure, and while he was uttering loud imprecations, Askalon entered the chamber.

"Thou art well met, my worthy predecessor," cried the high-priest. He then related to Askalon the story of the King's murder, and the failure of the slaves to capture Nibamon, his protégé. He also expressed the hope that Askalon would withdraw his protecting hand from the assassin of Royalty, and assist in the capture and punishment of the culprit.

Askalon feigned great astonishment, and, with assumed sadness, he deplored the untimely death of the



ZOBEIDE, THE MOUNTAIN BEAUTY, ADMINISTERING THE FATAL LOVE-POTION TO THE KING.

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noble King. He assured the high-priest that, After the commission of such a dastardly act, he withdrew all further favor from Nibamon, and would do all in his power to aid in his apprehension.

"Possibly," he said, with assumed innocence, "your slaves may find him concealed in my laboratory, which he often frequents, as I have given him permission to use my books and apparatus."

Askalon well knew that Nibamon *was* in the laboratory, credulously secure in the protection, promised by his master, if discovery were made that the King had been killed by poison. The ex-Prime Minister knew not how it came that Nibamon was accused of the crime; while he, who had really conceived it, was not mentioned as having had aught to do with it; but he wisely asked no questions. He saw a ready way to be rid of his accomplice, now that he had no further use for him; so, on the information that he furnished, the slaves set out again to capture the seer.

When they were gone, Askalon and the high-priest conferred together in whispers; and subsequently the priestly caste was notified by its chief that it was against the tradition and the edicts of their religion to mete out punishment to a female for crimes committed upon persons not belonging to their Order, even though the victim be of Royal blood. Accordingly, soon after, Zobeide was spirited away from the temple-dungeon, and was not heard of again in the city.

As intimated by Askalon, the slaves of the temple found Nibamon in the laboratory. He was dragged to the deepest dungeon of the temple-prison, and was permitted to communicate with no one. In the most

heartrending tones he begged to be allowed to see Askalon, but his pleadings were unheeded. Hope left him, and he was filled alternately with fear and remorse. Then an uncontrollable desire for revenge seized him, and in sentences broken by the very intensity of his passion, he told all that he had done at the command of Askalon. But his charges fell upon unheeding ears. His utter helplessness overcame him.

On the third day after his incarceration, Nibamon, weak and haggard from mental agony and from loss of food, was led to the court-yard of the temple-prison, where the high-priest, the chief dignitaries of the church, and Askalon were assembled to sit in judgment upon his crime. His eyes fell upon Askalon first, and the mild-mannered Nibamon was consumed by a fury appalling to behold. He hurled the burly slaves who held him, to either side, as if they were men of straw; he dropped on his knees before the high-priest and began to shout charges against Askalon; when, on a sign from the chief, a slave with a club struck the seer a terrible blow upon the mouth, rendering the unfortunate astrologer speechless.

In terse language the chief accused the Egyptian of usurping the power and functions of priests that dealt in magic, and accused him of having killed Cahina's father and also her consort by means of poisons. He requested the priests to judge as to the punishment adequate for the crimes of so vile a wretch.

With one accord they gave their sentence:

"Let him be flayed alive."

When Nibamon heard the awful punishment pronounced, he emitted a deep groan of agony, and his

frenzied eyes wandered pleadingly from one to another of his judges. No look of human pity answered to his pleading. And hardest of all was it for him to meet the eyes of Askalon, sleek, cool, and unconcerned, except for a certain look of surprised horror that any man could sink so low as to commit the crimes of Nibamon. If hate concentrated in a look could kill, Askalon would have dropped dead where he stood.

But before Nibamon could make a single movement, or utter a word, he was seized by the slaves, his body extended flat upon the ground, and thongs firmly tied round his wrists and ankles. The ends of the thongs were then attached to pegs in the ground. These preparations all complete, the executioner,—his head and face concealed beneath a red hood in which were openings for his eyes and mouth—advanced with small, sharp knife in hand, sprang upon the naked form of Nibamon, and executed the cruel decree of the priestly court. He paused not in his ghastly work until it was complete, though death had long before released Nibamon from his sufferings.

*Chapter Eight.*

# The Queen of Two Kingdoms.

WHEN Cahina returned to Constantine, she found the city draped in mourning, in honor of the dead King. Solemn rites were celebrating in the temples, and prayers and supplications were offering to Muth, the god of death, who was represented as a small child.

Cahina's first official act was to order that the body of the King be embalmed, ostensibly in accordance with the ancient religious dogma, "that the body of a sovereign must be kept in good condition, in order to receive again its soul for future re-incarnation," but really to preserve it for transportation to his kingdom, that his people might be convinced it was the corpse of their King, and that no foul play had been committed.

From her grandmother Cahina learned of her husband's relations with Zobeide, the manner of the King's death, and Nibamon's connection with it. She made no comment upon the tragic end of her consort, but inquired as to what had become of Nibamon. Naomi told her that the seer had been turned over to the priestly tribunal for punishment, and that, she had been informed, he had undergone terrible torture, and had died in great agony.

"His death is a loss to students of mystic learning," commented Cahina. "His great knowledge was useful

to me in the past; it would have been more so in days to come; but I must now resign myself to fate, and penetrate alone and unaided the secrets of the future.

As soon as possible the Queen convened the ministers and the nobles of her kingdom in the great audience-hall of the palace, and there addressed them. She began by stating that she, in conjunction with the nation, deeply deplored the King's death. Then she added, as the blood mantled her cheeks:

"The King is not dead, but still lives and will reign over thee through his own flesh and blood. A son was born to him while I sojourned in the mountains, where he now is, and will remain until manhood. Of this expected event reference was made at a previous council of State. I have named thy new King Ibn-Cahina, in honor of Ibn, his grandsire, and of myself. In his person are united the Berber and Mauritanian kingdoms, stretching from the Atlantic ocean to the confines of Egypt, together forming one of the richest and most powerful countries in the world, and well capable of coping with our most formidable foes. Soon will I go to Tingis to take formal possession of that kingdom as Regent for my son Ibn."

The assemblage received this news with every manifestation of great joy.

Cahina's next act was to recall Askalon from his enforced retirement. She made it plain to him that she would not restore him to power at that time, but would entrust him with a delicate and important mission, and if he acquitted himself satisfactorily in its discharge, she would reinstate him as Prime Minister. Askalon, who was an expert in counterfeiting emotions, was

exceedingly humble in her presence, and swore he was ready to give up even his life to make renowned and brilliant the reign of his exalted Queen, Cahina.

"Repair then," she demanded, "to Tingis, the capital of Tingiana, and inform the officials and subjects of the late King of his untimely death, caused by a stroke of apoplexy. Assure them of my profound sorrow and of the grief of my subjects, but chiefly apprise them of the birth of an heir to the kingdom of his father. Prepare them for the regency of the united kingdoms during the minority of the infant King; and see to it that on my entrance into the capital of my new realm, which will shortly follow thy arrival, I am accorded a proper reception by the officials and the multitude."

Askalon departed; and, after reaching the capital of the dead King, he busied himself in making such arrangements as the Queen had directed.

Six weeks after he had reached the city, the Queen appeared before the gates of Tingis, accompanied by a magnificent and imposing military force, which acted as an escort and guard of honor for the body of the late King of Tingiana.

Never before was such a procession seen in the kingdom. Cahina well knew that the royal road to the hearts of her subjects was Royal display. The people saw first a priestly band of one hundred musicians in white tunics, with tiger skins dangling from their shoulders. Then came the high-priest, attired in his official robes of spotless white, and mounted on a pure-white steed, with gilt trappings. Following him was a small army of priests similarly attired, and wearing headgears of ostrich plumes, which waved like fans as the priests

chanted in unison a funeral anthem. Behind the priests was the catafalque, draped in purple cloth, shaped like a boat, and mounted upon a sledge, drawn by eight black horses, caparisoned in silver harness. In the sarcophagus, on the body of the Emperor, rested his diadem, his precious jewels; the gold and silver flagon from which he drank libations to the gods; his favorite dishes of meat, drink, and fruit; his silver furniture; his wardrobe of State; his sword, and other accouterments.

Immediately at the rear of the catafalque rode Queen Cahina, on a jet-black Arabian charger in purple harness, ornamented with precious jewels. She was clothed completely in dazzling armor, so light and delicate in its construction as to yield to every movement of her graceful form. Over the armor she wore a flowing mantle of purple cloth, as a badge of mourning.

Escorting the Queen was a legion of mountain Berbers, each man of giant stature, well mounted, and bearing spears and battle-axes. They had the characteristics of their race: tall, noble-looking men, fair-skinned, yet browned by exposure to the scorching rays of an African sun; with an air of pride and indomitable love of freedom that ever showed itself in the faces of the Berbers, and in their action and in their speech. The necks of the animals they bestrode were covered with cloths of a hundred different hues, which served to fix attention until the flower of the Berber nobility appeared, mounted on spirited chargers. The nobles were attired in rich costumes, that glittered with gold and jewels, and, as they rode into the city, they held their gleaming swords aloft.

As the cortége approached the central gate of the

city, they found assembled there the ministers of the late King of Tingiana and a goodly portion of the populace. The generals of the army, at the head of a large detachment of soldiers, and the high-priest, with a numerous following, fell into line and acted as an escort for the Queen and her retinue.

As the procession passed slowly through the streets, densely packed with humanity, the native priests frequently sprinkled along the route water from large golden spoons. Their chanting was drowned by the populace, which, when it saw the somber funeral car, gave vent to its grief in loud lamentations. Some rent their clothing and tore their hair; others, while expressing their sorrow, loudly eulogized the valor, virtues, and noble qualities of their late King.

These demonstrations continued until the grief-stricken, lamenting throng caught sight of the majestic form and brilliant appearance of the mystic Queen. Its grief was changed into delirious joy, and its lamentations into cries of delight. The people prostrated themselves upon the ground as she passed.

"Welcome to our land, great Prophetess-Queen!" rolled the mighty cry along the entire line; "mayest thou reign over us many years in glory and in honor; May thy justice protect us from oppression at home; and may thy great power stem the dreaded Moslem invasion of our country."

In the light of her lustrous presence, and in the expectancy of future benefits to be derived from her mystic powers, their dear King was forgotten, and the existence of her son and successor was ignored.

When the palace was reached, the catafalque was

detached from the procession, and, in charge of the priests, was drawn to the Royal catacomb of the temple, there to receive the last funeral rites before interment. At the foot of the steps leading to the palace Cahina was received by the principal Court officials, the palace household, and the highest nobles of the land, all attired in robes of State. They prostrated themselves before her, and from every throat issued the mighty cry, "The gods preserve and guard our Prophetess-Queen, she who brings to us victory!"

Then the high-priest of Tingiana, stepping forward and extending his hands to command silence, invoked the blessings of the gods in behalf of the new ruler.

The master of ceremonies now approached, and proclaimed to the vast crowd before the palace, that the coronation of Cahina as Queen in her own right would take place in the great banqueting hall of the palace, in the presence of the members of the Court and the priests of the realm.

Upon this announcement, there arose a murmur of discontent. This instinctive protest did not escape the keen eyes of Cahina, and she rightly attributed it to the disappointment of the crowd at not being able to witness the ceremony; so, raising her arm aloft, her burnished armor glittering in the dazzling sun, she commanded silence.

The muttering ceased instantly, and Cahina then ordered the master of ceremonies to announce to the people that she refused to be crowned in the great hall of the palace. It was her will that the ceremonies should take place on the marble colonnade at the head of the stairway, leading to the palace, so that all her

subjects might witness the spectacle. A shout of joy testified to the appreciation of her people.

Cahina ascended to the highest elevation of the pure white marble colonnade, her majestic figure towering above the multitude. Thither followed the high-priest of Tingiana, an aged man with flowing white beard, accompanied by two slaves. With great deference he approached the Queen, and his feeble hands essayed to place upon her noble brow the ponderous iron crown, that once encircled the massive head of the brave Genseric, King of the vandals, conqueror of Rome, and ruler of Africa. But the aged priest could raise the crown only to Cahina's waist, and he struggled to elevate it to her head. The multitude shrieked with fear lest he drop it. Such a misfortune would surely augur calamity to the reign of the Queen.

But their fears turned to joy. For Cahina, with a quick movement, took the crown from the priest's weak grasp, and, with her small, white hands, placed it lightly upon her own head. The priest silently blessed her for this act of kindness, while the shouts of delight of the multitude mingled with the blare of trumpets and the crash of cymbals. The ceremony of coronation was concluded when the high-priest anointed her head and cheeks with a few drops of sacred oil, and administered to her the prescribed oath. Cahina then assumed the scepter, her sway at that moment extending from the confines of Egypt to Cape Nun, and embracing more than four thousand miles of seacoast, covering the rich territory that is to-day occupied by Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, and Tripoli, and penetrating inland far beyond the Atlas mountains, into the Desert.

Out of respect to the memory of the King, Cahina dispensed with the usual festivities and entertainments that are part of coronation ceremonies.

The newly-crowned Queen spent two whole months in Tingis, and made no preparations for leaving until she had thoroughly consolidated her rule. She inspired the resident nobles with the fear of a Mohammedan invasion, which they were the better able to appreciate from having had many of their coast-cities and adjoining territories wasted by a daring Moslem raid twenty years before. It is true that the invaders on that occasion were ultimately driven back and cut off in their retreat until merely a handful of the original force reached the shelter of the Libyan Desert.

The secret Moslem successes in Asia Minor, however, had gradually become known to all the inhabitants of the North African coast west of the Libyan Desert, and many of the warlike inland tribes that had never within the memory of man been at peace with each other, began to draw together in the fear of falling victims to a common enemy. To the warlike tribes of the interior, and to the peaceful traders of the coast alike, the presence and leadership of Cahina seemed the only means of salvation from the onslaughts of the Moslem hordes. As a prophetess her renown was spread far and wide, and this gave her a hold over the common people that she was not slow to improve.

Shortly after Cahina had reached her own capital, upon her return from Tingis, she was informed that Cornelius, a distinguished Byzantine soldier, who had arrived in the city the previous night, requested the privilege of an audience with the Queen.

He was at once introduced into the Royal presence and received in full state. He was a man of middle age and of commanding presence. His features, of noble mould, were bronzed by years of exposure to the Mediterranean sun. His tall and erect figure was lithe and muscular, and his movements were characterized by the ease and grace of high breeding, and by that polish that could, then, be obtained only by a long residence at the court of the Byzantine emperors. His forehead was high and broad, his large, dark eyes full and clear, his nose aquiline, and his mouth firm. Never had the Queen beheld a man of such presence, and even before he spoke she thrilled with strange pleasure at the sight of such a splendid-looking soldier.

Cornelius told his story, simply, with composure and dignity. He had been on his way to join the forces of the Byzantine Emperor in Italy, when a furious storm had arisen and had blown his vessel out of its course, in a westward direction, finally wrecking it on the coast of Cahina's kingdom. All the passengers and crew, including some thirty trained soldiers, had been saved. He craved the hospitality of the noble Queen, and, as soon as it was fitting—should it be her pleasure—also a vessel to convey him and his fellow-voyagers and his followers to their original destination.

At the sound of his voice, which was manly and resonant, Cahina felt a deeper thrill in her veins; she could hardly trust herself to reply. Nevertheless, she managed to say that, She would personally hear his request at length as soon as the remaining affairs of State, arranged for the day's session, had been discussed.

During the time that Cahina was thus engaged, Cor-

nelius chanced twice to meet her gaze. He could not look elsewhere; he felt dominated by a subtle influence he could not resist. His eyes were fixed upon the noble countenance of the Queen, and his soul was inspired with an all-pervading sentiment of awe, reverence, and devotion, which it had never before known.

He was roused from his bewilderment by hearing that wondrous voice, inviting him, in low, soft, yet distinct tones, to a position at the right of the throne. With a trepidation that he, a warrior, had never before experienced, he ascended the steps leading to the throne, and occupied a seat next to that of the Queen, but lower. She then requested Cornelius to tell her of the recent battles between the Moslems and the Byzantine Emperor in Asia Minor. She ordered the chief dignitaries to approach closer to the throne and listen to the recital. Among them was Askalon, the Prime Minister, and Hafis, the Captain of the City Guard, who had received Cornelius on his entrance into the city.

The position in which Cornelius was placed was to him one of much trial. He was a man of deeds, rather than words, and he felt little encouragement to speak at length when he noticed the cold and unsympathetic looks of the haughty men of the Court. But when he saw the dazzling eyes of Cahina, speaking eloquent and sympathetic encouragement, the spell was broken; he lost all consciousness of any audience but the Queen.

He felt divine inspiration and intense enthusiasm, such as he had never before experienced. His mind seemed exalted and miraculously quickened. Burning, fervid words rushed to his tongue. Graphically he detailed the stirring events of the bloody strife—individual

acts of bravery and heroic efforts made by the Byzantine army. All listened in rapt silence; and when Cornelius had finished his story, he became conscious of a murmur of approbation in the Court. Only Askalon's lips curled slightly in derision, and his eyes shot envy at the narrator. Cornelius heeded him not—what cared he what others thought? he was fully recompensed by the gracious smile that the Queen bestowed upon him. She dismissed the courtiers, but bade Cornelius remain.

When they had departed the Queen turned to him, and said she was rejoiced to have met a man of such courage and daring; and that the acquisition of such a leader might be desirable in her own kingdom, though she had able generals in her army. His remarkable accounts had interested her in his welfare, and, as she desired to know more of his life, she requested that he remain in the city until such time as she could again grant him an audience in the palace.

Cornelius thanked her for her courtesy and interest in one so humble, and he left her presence dazed and exhilarated, as one in a dream.

For many days Cornelius and his few followers remained in the city as guests of the Queen, he patiently waiting the expected summons to appear before her. To relieve the protracted monotony, he each day drilled his small force in intricate movements. These daily exercises attracted much attention, and the people were always delighted at the opportunity to witness the skill of the soldiers. They were far superior in training to the warriors of the Queen; and it was not long before this fact reached her ears. Hafis, the Captain of the guard, with whom Cornelius was now on most friendly

terms, told him that the generals were growing restless and uneasy, fearful lest the Queen select the strange commander as the head of the Royal forces.

While loitering in the city, Cornelius learned the history of the wondrous woman who had united and unified in her kingdom so many warring races and factions. This memorable story he heard with deep interest and delight from the lips of Hafis and from many of the Court-attendants.

When Cornelius had become fully informed as to the story of Cahina and her reign, there came to him a summons from the Queen, through Hafis, who was one of the few honest men at the Court, and upon whom the Queen relied implicitly.

"Know, Cornelius," said Hafis, "before you appear in the presence of the Queen, it is but right I should inform you, for your own guidance, that you stand high in her favor. She has studied carefully the documents placed by you in her hands at your previous audience. Since your arrival here your movements have been scrutinized at her command, and she has had daily reports through a reliable officer of the Royal household. I know for a certainty that she has faith in you, principally because you are of different mould and mind from the effeminate members of the Court, but partly because of your unusual ability as a soldier. These things I learned through my official position; and I frankly tell you now because I am your friend, and your welfare is dear to my heart."

Cornelius pondered deeply what he had heard; and he resolved to accept any post offered to him, provided it was compatible with his dignity. The internal wars

of the Byzantine Empire made him indifferent to his original quest, as in Cahina's kingdom there was equal chance of warfare against the Moslems.

On the following day Cornelius went to the palace. When he entered the audience-chamber he was accompanied by Hafis. Both bowed low before the Queen, who graciously asked them to be seated near the throne. She turned to Hafis and said:

"I have found new honor for thee. The Captain of the Sacred Band is dead, and I need one, in whom I have faith, to be his worthy successor. Therefore to thee, Hafis, do I offer this position, as a reward for thy ever-ready and faithful service in the past. As I shall frequently require thy personal attendance, thou wilt have thy quarters in the palace. What sayest thou, Hafis, if I have it in mind to appoint Cornelius in thy place as Captain of the City Guard?"

Hafis arose and replied: "Your gracious Majesty knows well that the servant thou dost deign to honor, and whose heart thou hast gladdened by thy words of trust and confidence, is frank and blunt of speech and but little given to words. Yet fain would he speak now in favor of another who, he thinks, if his Queen will give him liberty to say it, should be honored with the post of Captain of the Sacred Band."

The Queen nodded assent, and the grizzled old warrior continued:

"In Cornelius thou hast a man in whom I, who have studied him, have the most implicit faith. He is younger than I, more active, and comes among us with practical military experience, and with a record of brilliant achievements in warfare surpassing that of any of

our military leaders. Were he not here, then should I gladly accept the office thou dost proffer me, with heart-felt joy at my Queen's expression of faith in me. But with my ever-constant respect for thy slightest wish, I feel it my duty to let thee know that one more worthy than I should be placed in a position where his experience may prove the salvation of our country when the threatened Moslem invasion becomes a reality."

As Hafis addressed the Queen, her amazement gradually became admiration. Giving up to another such an honor and distinction as the captainship of the Sacred Band, was unknown in the Court, where ambition always joined hands with treachery and intrigue for the advance of oneself. Here was the maker of a new record in Court-circles—a man who deliberately put loyalty to the best interests of his sovereign before his own interests, and who had the modesty and courage to declare another to be greater than himself.

Hafis' few simple words was the longest speech the brusque old warrior had ever made. Cahina realized that his heart must have been deeply stirred to have lent such fluency to his tongue.

Cahina turned from Hafis to Cornelius. She saw that the younger man was regarding his friend with sheer astonishment. He attempted twice or thrice to speak, but either his emotion or his deference to the Queen made the words he would utter, die unframed on his lips. She was sure, then, of what she before had but shrewdly guessed, that the action of the old soldier had not been solicited, and that it was as much a surprise to Cornelius as to herself. Yet, for some reason hidden in her womanly heart, a reason that she did not then take the

trouble to explain to herself, she was not displeased at the recommendation made by Hafis.

"Hafis," she said, rising, "many times have I spoken in praise of thee; indeed 'tis a matter of common knowledge to thee and to the members of this Court. Now would I bestow upon thee the highest praise that lips can utter—thou art a man! Would," she added sadly, with a subtle undertone of cynicism, "there were more like thee in the Court. As for the post to which I would appoint thee, thou knowest my action was inspired by my faith in thee and as a tribute to thy fidelity. But thou, caring more for the welfare of the kingdom than for honor for thyself, hast sought fit to name for the place another, and one who is a stranger among us. Thy judgment, to the knowledge of the Queen and the members of the Court, has ever been right and just in measuring men,—yet, in the present instance, I doubt the wisdom of choosing the stranger for such an important post. What if his tales of war, his part in the conflicts, and the scrolls he presents be false?"

Cornelius gave an involuntary toss of the head, which showed quick anger as well as the unspoken protest of a man of honor whose vulnerable spot is the imputation of dishonor. But the Queen seemed not to be conscious of the little by-play; her attention was all given to the old soldier standing before her.

"Nay nay, good Queen," said Hafis hastily, "I have settled these matters beyond doubt. I tell thee, frankly, thou mayst trust him as thou hast trusted me. As for the wisdom of such appointment, if thou wilt permit but a word more, his selection for the post of honor would be most wise and fitting. Being a stranger, he

is not concerned in any of the bickerings of the generals or nobles, and he could therefore serve thee with free hand,—having none to look to but his sovereign."

"Thou art become a statesman, as well as thou art a valorous soldier," remarked Cahina laughingly; then, in serious tone, she continued: "Thou hast to-day, Hafis, added more honor to thyself in my sight by the honors thou hast rejected, than any word or act of mine could bestow upon thee. What thou sayest of thy friend Cornelius has impressed me deeply, and I will give it serious consideration."

They left the Royal presence, and, as they walked through the gardens of the palace, Cornelius uttered full and fervent expression of his gratitude, begging Hafis, however, not to forego his own future for his friend's sake, and insisting that he reconsider his determination. "I will not rise to power and position through your sacrifice, my generous friend, and I will so inform your noble Queen for—"

But Hafis cut short his protest by saying such a course would be folly; that his own mind was unalterably fixed on this point, and that the nation needed the best warrior to lead it, and the best was Cornelius; and so there was nothing more to be said.

On the following day, Hafis, his face glowing with satisfaction and pleasure, handed to the astonished Cornelius the latter's commission as Captain of the Sacred Band. It was accompanied with a purse of gold, a gift from the Queen, with which to buy suitable attire for Court attendance and for military accouterments.

"You now hold," said Hafis, when he had delivered these things and had congratulated Cornelius on the

appointment, "a position of power and responsibility: power, because you will be in continual attendance upon the Queen, and can, therefore, command a hearing at any time; responsibility, because you guard the palace and the Queen's sacred person."

"I think not of the honor, noble Hafis, so much as of the generous friendship to which I owe it," said Cornelius, a quaver in his voice.

"Speak not so; you are the man to fit the hour, and you must be equal to your opportunity. But your path will not be one of roses; for the honors that will be yours are zealously sought after by the sons of our noblest families, and the appointment of you, a stranger, has naturally created envy and hatred. Askalon, the Prime Minister, is of all the members of the Court the one most incensed, and I warn you to be on your guard against him. You already are sufficiently familiar with his career to know with what manner of man you will have to deal. His services have made him almost indispensable to the Queen, who treats him with high consideration, and he is likely to retain his present position. His chief ambition is to become absolute ruler of the land, through an alliance with the Queen. In you he sees a rival; so be constantly on your guard against secret plots or open attempt at your destruction."

In assuming the duties of his new position, Cornelius was installed in luxurious rooms in the palace, in the same corridor as the apartments reserved for the use of the Queen and her attendants.

By that time Cahina had matters moving satisfactorily. She was idolized by her subjects, who would count any sacrifice a pleasure that helped to preserve

her crown or defend their country. She instituted tournaments of skill and strength at arms, chariot races, and athletic sports of all kinds.

In this wonderful work of regenerating the millions over whom she ruled, the Queen displayed a power almost supernatural, and accomplished results that were regarded as miraculous. She was also very liberal in religious matters. While she rigorously maintained the religion of State in all its ancient glory, and the yearly festival in honor of Moloch was held with great pomp and splendor, each inhabitant, whether Christian, Jew, or pagan, was permitted to worship in perfect freedom at the shrine of his own religion.

During his first night in the palace, Cornelius was busily engaged in arranging his military accouterments. It was near dawn when he finished, and, without disrobing, he threw himself wearily upon a divan, for a few hours' sleep. How long he slept he knew not, but he was suddenly awakened by a great tumult in his apartment. The screams of a servant brought others scurrying to the scene; and when Cornelius leaped from the divan, he beheld them, an excited group, staring wildly toward his couch. He followed the direction of their gaze, and to his horror he beheld—a deadly cobra curled up on the coverings.

To his questions, the servant, trembling with fear, replied that he had entered the room to aid his new master in making his toilet; and, finding Cornelius asleep on the divan, he had noticed that the coverings on the couch had been disturbed, and had proceeded to smooth them. As he lifted the outer covering, he fortunately discovered the cobra, which must have lain

there all night snugly coiled in the warm coverings in the middle of the bed.

Cornelius quickly decided that it would be unwise for him to mention the matter at present, so he merely ordered one of his servants to kill and remove his unwelcome room-mate. Cautious questioning of members of the Royal household assured Cornelius that no snake had ever before invaded the palace, which was situated on a high elevation above the surrounding country. He therefore concluded that an enemy, and supposedly Askalon—too crafty and cowardly himself to kill him—had committed to a worthy substitute, the serpentine assassin, the unwelcome task. To the fact that he had taken his rest on the divan instead of his bed, the Captain owed his life. When Cornelius mentioned the incident to Hafis, his tried friend agreed with him as to the author of the attempted murder by deputy, and suggested that nothing be done except to guard himself against the new form that the envy of the ingenious Askalon would next assume. Accordingly, Cornelius went back to his duty, and made no mention of what had happened.

When he had been duly installed in his post, Cornelius wrought a great change in the soldiers under his command. They felt the keenness of his mind, the wisdom of his orders and methods, the pervading force of his personality, and his absolutely fearless bravery. They were all trusted and tried men, the flower of the various commands, united to make the Sacred Band the finest body of warriors in the kingdom. Cornelius drilled them in so many new movements, and brought them up to such a state of soldierly perfection, that

their former accomplishments, which had been the pride of the nobles and the commoner classes, by comparison seemed but the awkward maneuvers of raw recruits. This demonstration of superior skill in tactics allayed all adverse criticism of the new commander of the Sacred Band.

Cornelius had been at the palace but a short time when other duties, beyond those of guarding the Queen's person, were entrusted to him. Cahina had matured her plans for the immediate future, and now her ambitious projects were apparent. Even those who knew her best were amazed at the stupendous preparations she ordered to repel the expected Moslem invasion. She had a secret ambition to form an alliance with the Byzantine Emperor, and, knowing Cornelius to be from Constantinople, she commanded his services as scribe and counselor in furthering her scheme. Thus, it happened, he was frequently summoned to transcribe documents that she addressed to the Emperor Leontius from the Berber tongue into Greek. She also honored him by seeking his views as to the best terms on which such an alliance could be made, and she praised him highly for the wisdom of his suggestions.

One night Cornelius was summoned to an important session of the ministers of State, which was attended by the Queen and Askalon. At the direction of Cahina, the ministers drafted a lengthy document in their native tongue, replying to the Greek Emperor's demand for large territorial concessions in consideration of his furnishing ships and troops to aid in the proposed warfare against the Mohammedans. When it was at length finished to the satisfaction of the Queen, the document

was turned over to Cornelius for translation. Zealously he applied himself to the arduous task. Much time was necessary to make the change, and the ministers, being dismissed by the Queen on account of the lateness of the hour, all left the cabinet, except the ever-watchful Askalon.

Cornelius stopped a moment to rest from his monotonous labor; and in the interval Cahina expressed a wish to know how much time he would need to finish the documents? He counted the unfinished pages, and replied that he would be busy until daylight.

"I much regret to rob thee of slumber," she said graciously, "but as it is of vital importance that the answer should leave for Constantinople to-morrow, there is naught you can do but finish it to-night."

Turning to Askalon she said:

"I see no reason, good Askalon, why thou shouldst wait until the document be finished. Seek thy couch, and I will keep vigil, that there may be no delay should Cornelius require explanation."

As a suggestion from the Queen was equivalent to a command, the minister arose, bowed his acquiescence, and strode out the room.

Cahina ordered a slave to bring a flagon of wine for Cornelius. She requested him to drink, that it might refresh him and ease his task. When he had thanked her and drunk the wine, and was about to resume the translation, she stopped him.

"You look fatigued," she said, in sympathetic tones. "Rest awhile, and tell me of your native country; of its people and their doings; of your adventures in many lands, and of—yourself."

Cornelius suggested that if the document were to be finished by dawn, he must sacrifice rest to the needs of the hour. He ventured to remind the Queen that she had but a short time before declared the important paper must be sent to Constantinople that day.

"Aye, good Cornelius," she replied. "My request has already served its purpose—it has dismissed my ministers. A queen has surely her womanly prerogative, of expressing her excuses and concealing her reasons. But thou art true and noble, and dissimulation with thee is unnecessary. Trusting in thine honor, I confide the truth to thee: this document was not intended for the eyes of the Byzantine Emperor, it was meant only for the ears of my ministers. The Emperor of Byzantium overestimates our need of him, and my ministers underestimate the untried strength and reserve power of my people. The compensation demanded by him is greater than I will for a moment concede. Extortion is the price that utter helplessness must pay for aid, but the Queen of the greatest kingdom in Africa can dispense with foreign hirelings. I will rely wholly on the courage and patriotism of my subjects. They believe in me, their Queen; they will follow whither I lead. They know the justice of the cause, and, fighting for home and honor and happiness, they will never surrender, but will destroy the invaders, and carry the glorious banner of our Nation victorious through the conflict."

"Thou hast truly, O Queen, a noble sovereign's noble faith in thy people, and surely, with thee as their inspiration, failure will be as impossible as for darkness to live in the sunlight. But if thou wilt graciously pardon my query," said Cornelius, the suggestion of

a smile about his lips, "is not thy cabinet of advisers an unnecessary evil, if, in a great crisis, thou dost get most help from them by blindfolding them, and thus increasing the natural darkness of their minds?"

"Though thou knowest well the world, Cornelius, thou hast seen little of ministers. Statecraft, not chess, is the queen of games, and often, too, the game of queens. Deception is often necessary in the world. If there be one place where it is not only necessary but praiseworthy, it is in dealing with a set of obstinate and obtuse ministers."

With these words she gracefully dropped the subject, by requesting Cornelius to talk no longer of things disagreeable, but to tell her of himself, more of the story of his life, which had already so roused her interest.

He became somewhat confused, and hesitated, hardly knowing how to begin. As she fixed her eyes intently upon his, again he felt the subtle thrill he had experienced on the occasion of his first reception at the Court. Words came to him easily then. He told her of his early life, his progress, his battles under foreign skies, his fears and his hopes, as they came to his mind, like figures in the kaleidoscope of memory. There was a manly ring through it all, neither too boastful nor too modest, but the simple recital of mere facts. A clever touch in description, a happy bit of phrasing, or an occasional thread of humor made his story intensely interesting to the Queen by his side.

While he spoke, his fair auditor expressed her pleasure with her eyes; when he had finished she told it with her lips. She was specially pleased to hear he had led such a singularly pure and stainless life—so different

from the men defiled by the vices that characterize the inhabitants of the African seacoast.

"Yet, on the other hand, ye men of the northern clime are often unsympathetic, severe, cold, and hard, like the icebergs of which travelers tell us, whose pure austerity repels. Happy must be the woman, be she queen or peasant, who finds life's crown in being mated with a man exempt from both extremes."

She roused herself from her reverie, as she became suddenly conscious of the drift of her words; and then, as a delicate pink faded from her cheek, she changed the subject by saying:

"Know ye that I am skilled in reading character? When first I beheld thee I felt that thou wert worthy of trust; for features so bold and manly as thine the gods leave only to those whose lives are noble and upright. Then I judged by sight alone; now that I may study thee closer, I bid thee place thy hand in mine, and look full into my eyes, that I may read thy mind, and that the secrets of thy very soul may be made luminant to me."

Cornelius placed a hand in hers. Her soft white fingers closed about his, and he was thrilled with the touch. She fixed her dark inscrutable eyes upon his; they seemed, in truth, to fathom his very soul. He felt she was acquiring a strange ascendency over him, though he inwardly protested at this conquest of his individuality.

She broke the silence by asking him, in a soft but commanding tone:

"Cornelius, tell me this hast thou ever loved? Pause ere thou answerest, as methinks I see in the past,

standing on the distant shore of our great sea, two beings in the morn of youth, exchanging tearful farewells, and vowing eternal devotion. The maiden has a sweet and comely face, and that of the youth is—"Oh, ye cruel spirits!" she exclaimed dramatically, "why obscure from my vision the light of his countenance?"

Was this a new phase of Cahina's wondrous power, with which she was credited among her people? Did she really see in a vision his farewell to the maiden that he loved, or was it the ruse of a clever woman pretending to a knowledge she did not possess, merely to lead him the easier into confession? He sought to evade her question; but her bewitching eyes seemed to have a compelling power that paralyzed his will, which yet struggled feebly to assert itself.

The encouraging smile died on her lips; her manner suddenly changed, and in a stern and imperious tone she desired his answer. Had she not asked—then why did he not answer? Was she not Queen—then why did he not obey?

Cornelius made no further protest. He no longer sought to resist her power. He felt it would be useless. He became dominated by one great absorbing thought—that it was impossible to conceal anything from this strange woman, who seemed to see his mind as one would look at a landscape through an open window. He felt it was treason to reveal to another woman the all-absorbing love he bore to Julia, the beautiful girl in Byzantium, to whom he was betrothed; yet he yielded seemingly against his own will, as would a child; and while he hated himself for his words, he heard his own voice, as in a dream, and as if he were

listening to another. He became conscious that he was telling Cahina in a natural and very commonplace manner, as if conversing upon the most ordinary topic, how he had first met Julia, how they learned to love each other; of their walks and talks, and their plans of happiness in the future when their whole world would be bounded by the four walls of their home, and then of their parting, their fond farewell, with their hopes for an early reunion.

Under the Queen's further inquisition, capturing his confidence by this strange assault, he said he knew not where Julia was at that moment, and that he suffered cruel anxiety on her account because separation, hard enough in itself, was made unbearable by the fear of a renewal of civil war in the empire.

The Queen removed her eyes from his, and let his hand slip gently from hers. Yet the spell under which Cornelius had labored was unbroken, and he was conscious, in a vague, irritating way, that his senses were still dominated by some subtle power.

The Queen paced the floor, seemingly absorbed in profound meditation. After a few moments she stood before Cornelius.

"It is decreed in the Book of Fate," said she, in tones vibrant with intense feeling, "that most men at your age are to meet some fair young girl, who, in their ignorance and conceit, they think fills their ideal. This surrender to a pretty face is not true nor eternal love. It is but a passing fancy, a temporary infatuation of the senses; no more like the sublime love that regenerates the soul, than the first faint rays of dawn are like the splendor of the noon-day sun. You have

not yet felt the surrender to an all-absorbing passion, sweeping you along as a mountain-torrent carries a chip of wood. Such is the one great love of a life, the love that is tested in the crucible of pure and unending devotion and of uncounted sacrifice. Be ever true to yourself, then will you meet the one for whom, and for whom alone, you are designed. Being true to oneself means rising superior to every fleeting fancy, making powerless all temptations to buy wealth, station, or other worldly gain by the sacrifice of that sacred passion known to man as love, and to the angels, as immortal fire."

What change had been wrought in Cahina, that she who had been so pure, so cold, so aloof from all thought or need of love, should give this revelation of its possibilities? Was this the Queen that once had found the stars, and dusty tomes, and Phœnician scrolls, her Paradise on earth? Love surely had raised her from mere philosopher and Queen to the dignity of woman, speaking her hunger for human love.

By a sudden change in mood, she tried to unclasp the massive gold chain that encircled her beautiful neck, and though it were a simple thing to unfasten, she seemed to tug at it as if it were some ingenious puzzle made of golden links, or as if some spell had turned it into a Gordian knot that only an Alexander could undo. Seemingly becoming nervous and irritated by her failure, she exclaimed: "My fingers are unsteady, they play me some sad trick; for ne'er before have they refused me so simple an office as the unfastening of my circlet. Wilt thou, Cornelius, let thy stronger fingers serve for mine?"



THE MOMENTARY INDISCRETION OF A SOLDIER THAT DARED TO LOVE A QUEEN.

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With the embarrassment of a soldier more familiar with handling sword and shield than with such dainty work as this, Cornelius stepped forward, and, in a clumsy way, endeavored to release the spring. Did ever hidden mechanism so conspire to help a man unequal to his opportunity? It refused to budge. Then his hand involuntarily slipping to get a slight purchase to act as a lever, he touched her pure white neck. In an instant he was thrilled. He felt the blood mantling his cheeks and temples. Feeling a vague shame, due to his weakness for this involuntary treason, he made a feeble effort to reassert his will, so to fill his mind with the vision of Julia, that she would save him from himself,—from this strange spell upon him.

But try as he might, her sweet image gradually faded before him; slowly the face of her whom he loved grew less and less distinct, fainter and still fainter, until, as in the witchery of a dream, her features became merged and lost in a new face, stronger, more powerful, yet beautiful withal, and the eyes of the second face smiled on him with an intensity of love in their depths, and with a subtle triumph, too. And then, the dream-face itself grew gradually more distinct, and he saw, as in a mist, the neck and shoulders of the Queen, and a pair of beautiful eyes, eloquent with feeling, steadfastly fixed on him. Then, in some subtle way, he felt that she knew all that had passed in his mind, and her voice seemed to loom loud in his ears as she said:

"Has your dream dispelled the delusion? I hope it has not deprived your arm of its power to loose this chain in which I am imprisoned."

Under ordinary circumstances Cornelius would have

resented such raillery, but now he failed to discover mockery in her words. He was under the spell of her enchantment; he knew not what he did. Her shoulder curved itself in ivory whiteness close to his lips. His head bowed suddenly, and then, in a moment, a tiny roseate aureole appeared on her delicate flesh as a danger mark Nature had quickly set to show the mad indiscretion of a soldier that dared to love a Queen.

The eyes of Cahina flashed with sudden anger.

"Dost thou dare," she exclaimed haughtily, "defile by thy plebeian touch the person the gods have anointed? Know ye not such act is punishable by death? Down on thy knees and crave forgiveness, lest I give thee over to the executioner."

Cornelius, completely astounded at the effect of his impulsive act, endeavored to comply with her command. Upon his knees at her feet he fell, convinced he had been guilty of a grievous sin, and fully intending to ask pardon for the crime he had committed; but when his mind had framed a supplication for mercy, his tongue refused to utter the words of penance. Instead thereof, burning words of love flowed in a torrent from his lips. Fervently he told her that he loved her passionately, that he loved none other, and that even if he were handed over to the executioner that very instant, he would still love her until death.

Cahina regarded him with wonder expressed in her eyes; she reflected for a moment. Then an amused smile crept round the corners of her mouth. She made a few passes with her jeweled hands before his face, and the mist cleared from before his eyes. For the moment she had forgotten that he was laboring under the spell

she had cast over him. Now that it had been removed, he begged forgiveness for having offended the majesty of her person.

"Rise, Cornelius," she said, "it is not my intention to punish thee for thy impulsive act. Thou art a stranger in my realm, under my protection, and enjoying my hospitality, therefore do I freely forgive thee. We will forget thy indiscretion."

In trying to open the clasp of the chain, Cornelius had pricked one of his fingers, and blood trickled slowly from the puncture. This was noticed by the Queen, as Cornelius rose. She took his hand in hers, held it tenderly for a moment in her moist palm as she examined the wound, and remarked it was a good omen; he would always be ready to shed his blood in defense of herself and her kingdom.

She raised her hand to her neck, touched the thin clasp of the chain, and it became loosed from its snowy environment as if by magic. She then placed it about his neck, and, as her fingers touched his throat, he again felt the ecstatic thrill that preluded his indiscretion of a few moments before.

"Accept this, Cornelius," the Queen said, "as a token of my pardon. Shouldst thou ever desire a great boon at my hand, send the chain to me, and, rest assured, it will be granted forthwith."

Cornelius was flattered and fascinated.

"Surely, O gracious Queen, such reward in the form of pardon would tempt man again to sin. I can but thank thee and tell thee that no mortal boon could tempt me to let this chain leave my body if parting with it be the price of the favor I might crave."

The Queen smiled and said: "May it bring to thee forgetfulness of this maiden who has disappeared. Thou wilt remember her no more, Cornelius?——"

With the golden chain of slavery round his neck, Cornelius replied that he believed he would never again meet Julia, and he would implicitly obey every command of Cahina without protest. He then added: "From henceforth I will never again mention Julia's name."

Yet the sound of that name had a soothing and vitalizing effect: it awoke in him a gleam of conscience, and for a moment he despised himself for his weakness and perfidy. Then he was recalled to the beautiful and stern realities of the present by the voice of the Queen, speaking in tones of sympathy, understanding, and companionship, and—perhaps love.

"It is well thus, Cornelius. I can now make a friend and confidant of thee; for I have none at Court. I am lonely; honesty that might be given to me as a woman becomes duplicity and hypocrisy when it reaches me as Queen. I pretend to listen to the advice of my ministers and generals, but when they have finished, I act upon my own judgment. Therefore know, Cornelius, how gratified I am to have near me one upon whose sincerity I can rely, and in whose presence I need not mask my thoughts. Thou shalt always be near me as my adviser and defender in the palace, as well as in the camp. Now, before we separate, I would tell thee that thou wilt soon witness a marvelous spectacle. The gods of my ancestors have inspired me with a grand conception to crown the climax of the coming fire-tournament, and I verily believe that it is intended more for thy benefit than that of others; but it must yet

remain a profound secret; for what I tell thee must rest with thee alone; we must count it as unspoken. Thou shalt know all in good time."

She arose and added softly: "The hour is late, it is now past midnight, and thou must depart. The time has flown but too swiftly."

Cornelius was loath to leave her, but, fearing again to displease the Queen and raise another sudden tempest, he left her presence, with deep regret. As he walked to his apartments, the incidents of the night came surging through his mind in fast and furious succession, and his heart was filled with sadness. He threw himself upon a divan, and soon was overcome by a feeling of lethargy, as if part of his soul had been riven from him. He closed his eyes; not to sleep, but in an effort to shake off the mental weariness that had crept over him after he had left Cahina.

As he lay on the divan, his mind conjured up many phantoms of doubt, foreboding, and perplexity. He was seized with a fear that Cahina's power might control his actions at times when he was far distant from her. He shuddered to think how helpless was his condition, if such was, in reality, to be his fate. He lay there for a long time, to ascertain, if possible, whether the glamour of his recent interview would disappear.

After a time, much to his relief, he felt that the mysterious influence that had held him captive was slowly passing away. His reason and natural feelings were again asserting themselves, and then, to his intense joy, he became convinced that his fears were groundless, and that the Queen would exercise no influence over him unless he were in her presence. More than that, he discovered

that he had not lost his self-respect, and that he was not the perfidious wretch he had imagined himself to be. He felt that he still loved Julia as fully, as deeply, and as absolutely as ever, and that she was first and only in his heart. He felt, too, that in abjuring his betrothed, he had but yielded to a dark power; and that his statements and promises, made under the subtle influence, were not binding on his conscience.

When Cornelius found himself thus restored to his normal self, his heaviness of heart vanished. Nimbly he sprang from the divan and sought some light refreshment. On a table at one side of the room he noticed a silver tray, filled with luscious fruit and sweetmeats. He was about to partake of the latter, when his gaze was arrested by scores of flies lying dead on the table and tray. He paused a moment, wondering as to the cause. In the interval, he was startled to observe several flies alight upon the dainties, and, tasting them, topple over dead. At the sight of this little banquet of death, his suspicions were roused.

From his servant he learned that at midnight a slave, in livery of the Queen, had brought the tray to the chamber, with the statement that it was for the Captain of the Sacred Band. By order of his master, the servant fed some of the sweetmeats to a dog; "and the animal," reported the servant, "dropped dead as if stricken by the wrath of the gods."

Cornelius was then convinced that he was but paying the price of greatness, and that a second attempt had been made upon his life. With thankfulness in his heart at his second escape, he put the poisoned sweetmeats away, where they could harm no one.

*Chapter Nine.*

# The Mystery of the Phœnix.

WHILE it had been announced that, according to the custom of the fire-worshipers, the priests militant alone would participate in the ceremonies of the fire-festival, the spacious amphitheater, modeled after the Flavian amphitheater at Rome, was crowded to its full capacity. Only on extraordinary occasions did the populace fill the great structure; but now, while no announcement had been made that anything unusual would mark the day, the people were eager and expectant, and fought strenuously for places of vantage. Behind the front rows of benches, reserved for the priests, the crowd, composed of Berbers, Nubians, and descendants of the Roman colonists, pushed and vociferated loudly in their efforts to secure good seats.

The canvas awnings, that ordinarily formed the roof of the vast structure, had been removed, and the clear, vaulted sky, resplendent with myriads of stars, formed the canopy. Gilded lamps, closely strung along the many aisles, from the upper-tier of seats to the foot of the arena, lighted the scene, and brought into strong relief the picturesque native costumes of those who occupied the benches. The bright colors were banked in rows, one above the other, until the whole array of

barbaric costumes, in their brilliant hues, gave a strikingly kaleidoscopic effect of color and combination.

The clarion tones of trumpets and the loud clash of cymbals announced the approach of the sacred musicians. Into the arena they came, followed closely by threescore of priests militant. Every rider was habited in a long, flowing robe of deep crimson stuff, a conical hat of the same material covering his shaven pate; a tiny, round lantern, burning a white light, glowed at the apex of his hat; a sword in red scabbard hung at his side. All were mounted on white horses with rich crimson trappings.

No lights burned in the arena; only a dim light was reflected from the lamps above the benches; thus the priests, in the swift and skilful evolutions, performed immediately after entering, resembled unearthly gore-covered beings.

Having finished the first evolution, Hormusjee, the aged preceptor, made a signal. Quickly the troop formed into straight column and dashed to the front of the raised throne. There sat Cahina, surrounded by her courtiers and the principal members of the nobility. She was attired in a robe of fiery color, adorned with cabalistic emblazonments, and surmounted by a broad collar of ermine,—the insignia of royalty,—which gracefully encircled her neck,—otherwise bare,—and descended on both sides to the hem of her robe.

The riders simultaneously leaped from their steeds and bowed low to the dust in obeisance to the Queen. At the same moment, the highly trained steeds, imitating the movements of their masters, dropped on their fore-knees, their heads pointing to the ground. And

thus horse and rider remained in an attitude of humble deference until, upon a signal from their Royal mistress, riders and steeds arose, and the priests bounded into the saddles.

The horses remained motionless, while the riders drew their swords and passed them to a slave stationed at the foot of the throne, who, in turn, delivered them to the Queen. She immersed each blade in a yellow fluid, contained in a red marble basin at her side. As she drew each weapon slowly from the basin, she uttered a silent incantation, and whirled the blade round a torch fastened to the edge of the basin. Instantly each steel blade was converted into a dripping sword of living fire, which burned continuously. These were passed back to the priests, and when she had caused the transformation of the last weapon, she modestly resumed her seat upon the throne, the superstitious multitude regarding her in silent awe.

The priests saluted Cahina with their swords; then they went through a series of swift gyrations, forming splendid pyrotechnic spectacles, symbolic of the religion of the fire-worshipers. The people were entranced as the skilful horsemen formed figures that resembled stars, luminous crescents, blazing comets, and burning arches; filing beneath the lambent flames unscathed. But the crowning act of the priests was a combat with the fiery swords, performed in strict accordance with the ancient fanatical rite in honor of Moloch, whom the contestants sought to propitiate either by their skill or their suffering.

Upon a blast of the trumpet, the holy swordsmen ranged themselves in two columns, front to front. At

command of Hormusjee they advanced and charged at each other fiercely. The spectators gazed with quick-drawn breath at the thrusting and parrying and clashing of burning swords, wielded by the frenzied priests. With desperation born of fanaticism they fought; none wavered. Repeatedly each column advanced and exchanged terrific blows, causing myriads of sparks to fly from the glistening blades.

Soon a gap was made in the left column of the swordsmen, the ranks were broken, and the strife continued in single combats, scattered over the entire arena. Every pair frantically thrust and cut, searing and scorching each other, until the air reeked with the odor of singed hair and scorched flesh, more welcome to the nostrils of the superstitious fire-worshipers than the sight of dying gladiators was to the Romans. Many of the priests succeeded in unhorsing their adversaries. From his charger's side the victor hung over his vanquished foe, searing him on his chest and feet. The tortured one made no sign for mercy, believing his suffering by fire would purify his soul, and soften the heart of the Fire-king, to his spiritual welfare.

Hormusjee watched the fiery combats with grim satisfaction; and when his keen eye saw that a fallen priest was about to succumb, he nimbly advanced and struck up the sword of the victor.

"Desist!" he commanded. "The Fire-god is satisfied with thy brilliant victory. Away now, and join the conquering brethren."

He then went to the assistance of the fallen one, and assured him that his sins had been purified by the scorching of his body; that Moloch was content with

the sacrifice; and he ordered the vanquished to join his brethren in rendering thanks to the Fire-god.

While the struggle between the priests had absorbed the attention of the spectators, a platform had been erected in front of the throne, and covered with a crimson cloth, under the direction of Hormusjee, who had been appointed by the Queen to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Nibamon. When it was finished, the preceptor of the militant priests ascended to the platform, and placed iron globes, in which charcoal fires smouldered, round the edges; and next to each he placed a casket containing powders of different hues. All these things done, he signaled to slaves stationed among the people, and they immediately extinguished the lights, leaving the amphitheater in total darkness. As the lights went out, black clouds rolled over and hid the stars, while thunder boomed and rolled and a fierce wind sprang up.

The spectators were compelled to remain in this gruesome situation until, seized by superstitious fear, they shouted for light. Suddenly, as if dropped from the leaden sky, a flood of brilliant light encircled the platform. In the midst of this glowing halo appeared a vision of beauty, clad in the garb of a seraph.

At sight of this vision the loud voices were hushed. The spectators were spellbound as the seraph spread its wings, and, while apparently skimming through the holy flame, scattered, through space, scintillations of the most brilliant hues. The vision appeared to ascend and descend gently through the constantly changing lurid blaze, and without injury. From a fiery-red the seraph gradually merged into a delicate orange tint; from this

she floated into a soothing shade of green, and thence into an imperial purple. These changes of color were continued until all was finally blended into one iridescent glow.

As the multitude shouted with delight at the novel and marvelous scene, their applause was cut short by the sudden disappearance of the flame. Into darkness they were again plunged, and they were now doubly overcome with awe; for the thunder, as a fitting accompaniment to round out the scene, crashed directly over them. They believed they heard the gods roaring in anger; instinctively they felt they were in the presence of a superior power. Their patience also was tested for a longer period than on the previous occasion, but this time all were too full of fear to cry out.

Suddenly, they were startled by the shrill screams of a wild bird, which rose high and piercing above the thunder. An instant later an immense sheet of fire leaped up from the platform, and, to the horror of the vast audience, it engulfed in a crater of fierce flame a divinely-formed woman, enveloped in canary-tinted gauze, a mask of feathers over her face, and wings extending from her arms, thus representing the Phœnix, the sacred bird of the ancient Egyptians. The bird struggled bravely to get away from the devouring flame; it skimmed back and forth through the blaze, rose and fell again, yet was unable to escape the ever-increasing whirlwind of fire.

The drapery around the lower limbs ignited, and the bird struggled vainly to extinguish the fire. The lurid flames seized the wings, and the now thoroughly-roused spectators leaped to their feet; women shrieked with

fright, and men prepared to rush upon the platform to extinguish the flames. With tense, drawn features they watched the Phœnix desperately flap its wings in an unavailing effort to stifle the blaze, which, only raising a great cloud of sparks and smoke, added volume and power to the fire.

As the roaring, seething flames increased, the bird continued its struggles in a manner appalling to behold. Each moment they grew less, and the witnesses knew it must perish. It became exhausted; succumbed to suffering and weakness, and fell helpless into the very center of the fiery crater, the impact hurling up forked tongues of fire, followed by volumes of burning cinders and smoke. All present stood aghast;—the bird lay in its fiery grave, seemingly dead.

Instantly, some of the women, suspecting that their lovely Queen had impersonated the Phœnix, and was perishing before their very eyes—began to offer up supplications to the Firo-god. The example of the few was followed by the multitude, and, in a moment, the great amphitheater rang with cries of anguish and with prayers for mercy.

An old soldier that had grown gray in the service of Cahina's father, leaped into the arena and called upon the men nearest him to assist in pulling the Phœnix from the fire. A group dashed forward, but, as they reached the foot of the platform, they stopped suddenly, as if turned to stone,—the bird rose lightly from the fire and the glowing ashes unharmed and unscathed! Not a feather was ruffled, not even the gauze was singed. The plumage was more brilliant than ever, and it sparkled like dew in the first rays of the sun.

All this was too much for the spectators. Some became delirious with joy, others wept in gratitude; while many rendered thanks to their respective deities. Hundreds vociferated madly, and full half the number struggled to reach the wonderful being,—to touch it with their hands, confident such holy contact would confer a blessing upon them through life. In endeavoring to escape from the multitude, the mask fell from the supposed bird, and there before them stood their beautiful Queen; and ere they could recover from their astonishment, she had vanished. The great amphitheater echoed with the shouts of joy and the utterances of love and devotion for the Queen, until the firmament seemed to take up the enthusiasm; for the stars reappeared from behind the black clouds.

It was late when the Queen, pale, exhausted, and still quivering with the excitement of the night, reached her apartments in the palace. She could not sleep. She felt a longing to know how the ceremonies had impressed Cornelius; and to that end she despatched a servant to summon him. When he appeared she immediately referred to the events of the night, and said she was curious to know his opinion as one who had never before witnessed such a spectacle.

"Your Majesty," he replied, "it was the most beautiful exhibition of stage-craft I have ever seen."

"Ah!" she retorted, an expression of disappointment flitting across her face. "Then thou dost not share the common belief of the people that the performances were miraculous?"

"Be not angry with me, O Queen, that I plainly speak the truth," responded Cornelius. "You say I

am a Greek and a stranger; but thou dost forget that I am a Christian also, and therefore cannot believe that miracles may be wrought by human hand. I believe only in the miracles performed by the Saviour. Therefore I should be heretical did I believe that mortals could imitate the performance of divine miracles. It is beyond me to accept the magical transformation of the fire-worshipers as miracles. In truth, I will tell thee, that, during the performance I stood in the angle formed by the platform and the throne, unseen by the audience but having full view of the platform and thy body-guard secreted within the space beneath the first tier of seats, placed there to protect thy sacred person should emergency require it. From this position I could plainly see thy Majesty deftly throw the powders into the numerous urns, and I also noticed how Hormusjee arranged the many mirrors and other devices in the rear of the platform, producing the wondrous sights that so amazed and roused the people."

The countenance of the Queen exhibited both pain and perplexity. For a moment she reflected, as if undecided whether to laugh or show vexation. Finally the humor of the situation prevailed.

"'Tis well thou art not a member of our sect of fire-worshipers," she remarked, laughing merrily, "else thy life would pay the penalty of thy frank avowal; but since thou didst inadvertently discover the secret while zealously providing for my safety, I would be ungrateful did I not forgive thee. Those parts of the magical rites thou hast discovered, I believe are safe in the breast of a devoted servant, who will not divulge them. Yet, thou knowest not all; thou couldst not

witness nor comprehend all that I have done. It is true that Hormusjee, whom I found in Tingis, and appointed in the place of Nibamon, whom he equals, if not excels, in the secret rites of the fire-worshipers, did aid me in some of the physical manifestations; yet there were other wonders that cannot be penetrated by the eye of man."

Concentrating her gaze upon Cornelius, she continued in softer tones: "Thou knowest I have read thy innermost thoughts. Is not such power divine? If I could perform one such act, why not another?" It seemed to him that her eyes burned into his, and again she obtained complete dominion over him. This time he did not struggle against it, but yielded quickly to the irresistible ascendency.

"Yes," he murmured dreamily. "If thou canst read men's souls, thou canst perform miracles."

She smiled in triumph as he said it, and the rigor of her voice relaxed.

"I am gratified, Cornelius, to hear thee acknowledge thy faith in my mysterious power. Now that thou hast done so, I will inform thee that it is my desire to introduce a season of gaiety and festivity both at the Court and among the people, and I would hear thy opinion on these projects. For the people, a series of games is contemplated, wherein the champions of the army may test their mettle against one another. Horse-races and chariot-races will be employed to intensify the interest. For the Court, I purpose a number of grand banquets, and I intend to introduce into this country a lost art, that of presenting on the stage, with classic effect, the great Greek and the Latin dramas."

When she had made this announcement she requested Cornelius to be seated on an ottoman beside her, and to tell her all that he knew of the great works, of which she had heard so much.

He complied, and until almost daybreak he held her spell-bound with recitations from Terence and Euripides. She, the imperious Queen, sat beside him, like a school-girl listening intently to the discourse of her teacher. As he spoke, Cornelius felt, even to a more intense degree than on any former occasion, the magnetism of her personality. He sighed with regret when he had quoted to her all the lines and scenes he remembered.

"Oh, Cornelius," she softly said, like one awakening from a pleasant reverie, "how many happy hours must have been yours amid such scenes of intellectual glory. How proud shall I feel when the inspiration of such great writers penetrates my benighted kingdom."

They then mapped out, roughly, schemes for perfecting and realizing the innovations planned by the Queen; and when he was departing, she told him that he was the only man in the kingdom upon whom she could rely for intelligent co-operation in the noble work, and that he should therefore soon be raised to the full rank of a minister.

As she was about to bid him farewell, she gazed at him wistfully for a moment, and he noted that tears welled up in her eyes. She spoke to him with tenderness and with hunger for love, giving a tremor to her voice—while a delicate flush came to her cheek.

"Oh, Cornelius, thou and all the world believest that the pomp and splendor surrounding the wearer of a crown make a proud and happy Queen; but couldst

thou look into the heart, thou wouldst there read a different tale." She turned from him quickly, her features underwent a change, and she spoke bitterly, steadying her voice the while : "But what can the sorrow and the loneliness of a pagan Queen be to a haughty Greek warrior and devout Christian?" And before he could say a word, before he could obey the impulse of his heart to comfort her, she had bidden him farewell and was gone.

For several days the Queen and Cornelius spent many hours together, planning the best way to establish numerous schools in the kingdom, and to give her people the possibilities for education and higher development that were enjoyed in Greece. When in her company Cornelius felt himself irresistibly drawn to her, but he never ventured to refer to what she had said to him on the previous occasion, when she had partly revealed a tenderness toward him ; on that night when the womanly side of her nature had almost made her forget the Queen. After that night, she spoke with him in her usual formal manner, sometimes even more formally, as if in defense against herself. In many little ways, too subtle for him to explain even to himself, he felt he had lost nothing in her regard.

The days succeeded one another in this delightful routine, until one day they were interrupted by word from one of the great merchants, craving early audience with the Queen, on a matter of urgent importance.

Being admitted to the presence of Cahina, he informed Her Majesty that his envoys, while returning over the desert, had learned from a body of Arab soldiers that Hassan, the Mohammedan general, would

shortly attack Constantine. This news changed the Queen instantly; her amiable mood vanished; her cheeks became pale, and her eyes shone with stern resolution —the Queen had now again become the warrior, the leader of her people. She immediately ordered Cornelius to summon all her generals and her ministers to a council, to be convened at the palace at midnight.

At the appointed hour all had assembled. As Captain of the Sacred Band, Cornelius, of course, had the right to be present.

The Queen, as briefly as possible, repeated the message she had received that day, and she invited each member of the council to submit his plan for repelling the Moslem hordes. They complied as she appealed to each in turn; but what they said seemed to make little or no impression upon Cahina. She gave more attention when Askalon arose and pompously declared it to be his judgment that the army should receive the attack of the enemy behind the impregnable walls of Constantine. He argued that the Arabs were unaccustomed to sieges, that they did not possess the necessary engines of war for demolishing strong walls, and that they must therefore fail to capture the city.

Cahina impatiently waited for him to finish. She turned from him with ill-concealed scorn, and then addressed Cornelius:

"Noble Greek, all have spoken except thyself; and as thou art versed in the art of war, I am desirous of hearing thy opinion."

The other members of the council betrayed astonishment at this request, and a painful silence ensued as Cornelius arose, and, paying no heed to the others,

informed the Queen that at the time the Moslem expedition captured Carthage and Utica it numbered forty thousand men; and that since that time this force must naturally have been lessened by losses in continuous warfare, by disease and other casualties, probably reducing the original number one-third. He pointed out that the enemy would approach through the burning desert, in all probability, carelessly and in disorder, deeming itself safe from surprise. His counsel would be, That an immense army be organized forthwith, and that a sudden night-attack be made on the Moslems while they were still some distance from the city, and before they could mass the various detachments into one body.

"Let our mighty army sally forth under the sacred standard of our beloved Queen," he cried enthusiastically, "and rush with the force of a whirlwind upon the unsuspecting robbers, and sweep them from the face of the earth."

His enthusiasm was infectious, and extended to the Queen herself.

"Thou speakest like the prophet, inspired by the great ruler Ahura Mazda himself. Thy plan unfolds itself like a divine revelation to my soul, presaging a glorious victory over the Moslem legions."

She turned again to her ministers, and continued: "And what say my wise councilors? Shall we adopt this plan of campaign?"

The wise councilors, having heard her commendation of the plan, of course lost no time in expressing their approbation; so, bowing low before Cornelius, they extolled its wondrous excellence.

"Since all are united," cried Cahina, with great enthusiasm, "let the edict go forth, that Queen Cahina calls for men to follow her sacred standard into the desert, to annihilate the Moslem invader. Stop!" she cried, as they were about to depart. "There is yet one important act to perform. As a token of gratitude for thy sagacious council in this crisis, and as a further mark of my appreciation of your ability in warfare, I now appoint thee, Cornelius, Commander of my entire army." Then to the members of the council: "What think you of my selection?"

Accustomed to blind obedience to their ruler, none daring to question her impulsive and most reckless acts, believing that she acted through divine inspiration and was therefore infallible, the ministers and generals prostrated themselves humbly, almost to the very ground, before Cornelius, the new commander.

"Hail! O great warrior!" they cried. "Lead us to victory against the Moslem thieves. We and our children will follow thee, wherever thou mayest lead, even unto the gates of death."

And shouting loud and long they departed joyously.

Cornelius was about to follow, when Cahina stepped to his side and whispered in his ear, her cheek almost touching his:

"When thou returnest, Cornelius, crowned with the laurels of a great victory, I will give thee the most precious token either Queen or woman can give of her everlasting gratitude."

The call to arms was issued on the following day, and it aroused the wildest patriotic enthusiasm throughout the land. Like the seething torrents rushing down the

mountain's side, men poured in from all directions to fight under the banner of the Queen whom they held in such awe and reverence. The coast of Africa yielded its rugged veterans, hardened in many bloody conflicts with daring robbers of the sea; the Moors of the plains, who claimed to be the original inhabitants of Mauritania, flocked to the emblem in droves, filled with a holy joy at the prospect of a fight with the children of the desert, their hereditary foe; the savage tribes swarmed from the mountains, wildly thirsting to shed the blood of the enemies of their idolized Queen; the cities yielded their affluent merchants and their skilful mechanics, who were willing to sacrifice their lives for the honor and glory of their benign ruler; unlike other sovereigns, she was no despot, and did not rob them of the hard-earned fruits of their years of labor. With them appeared thousands of Christians and Jews; they rallied round the banner of their idolatrous but tolerant Queen, who permitted every man to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience.

All these diverse elements, consisting of many races creeds and colors; all these independent mountain-tribes the wandering nomads of the desert, the fierce pirates of the coast, embittered by feuds and religious hatreds existing for centuries, and still harboring vengeance against one another for desolate homes, plundered hamlets, and murdered kinsmen, were now united in a common cause, actuated by the same motive, inspired by the same noble impulse—to struggle unto death for the preservation of their native soil under the leadership of their noble Queen.

The appointment of Cornelius as Commander of the

army, though not hailed with enthusiasm, was not questioned or criticised. Although he was a stranger and a Christian, the people rendered him homage; and so great was their desire to fight for the Queen, that they yielded implicit obedience to his command. While his task of training this great host—it numbered a hundred thousand men—was an arduous one, it was made less difficult owing to the spirit in which the men entered upon their work. Cornelius labored night and day, and soon the vast host became impressed with his personality and with his thorough understanding of the work he had undertaken; hence, by the time he deemed them fit to go into battle, he had so inspired them with confidence in himself, that the army cheered him wherever he appeared and give his commands.

Cornelius was right in supposing that the Moslems would soon be upon the city, and that it was necessary to have his army prepared at the earliest possible moment. While the men were organizing, reports of the approach of the enemy were received by the Queen. Finally the news came that the Moslem army, under Hassan, was rapidly approaching in two divisions.

*Chapter Ten.*

## The Queen's Narrow Escape.

CORNELIUS divided his army into three corps of equal numbers: one was a camel corps, armed with spears; a corps of horsemen, armed with simitars, was another, and the third consisted of a corps of warriors afoot, who carried bows and arrows and javelins. Cornelius had the army drawn up in the final order of battle, and he seized the occasion to inform his subordinates that, before another day had gone by, they would surely meet the enemy.

Hardly had he finished speaking, when two couriers approached on fleet horses. One stopped and informed Cornelius that the first division of Hassan's army was within a day's march of the city. The other courier dashed on to tell the Queen of the nearness of the enemy. Upon receipt of this information Cornelius directed that the soldiers were to be prepared to move at dawn, the following day. This order caused the greatest joy and enthusiasm in the ranks.

As the first faint streaks of dawn illumined the eastern sky, the army was quickly formed in marching order. Cornelius was in his place at the head of the column, awaiting only the coming of Cahina. Soon she dashed up to the front, accompanied by a brilliant retinue; she wheeled her horse beside that of the Commander. Her

appearance so thrilled her followers, that they involuntarily shouted their admiration.

She was mounted on a milk-white horse, in gold trappings of war. Her majestic form was encased, from her shoulders to her feet, in a shining armor, made of small, bright steel links, that glistened in the light with every movement of her graceful body. On her head rested a golden helmet; from beneath, her hair floated loosely in wavy ripples.

As she galloped along the lines, proud and dignified, to those who saw her she appeared like an inspired goddess of war. The old veterans, who had fought under the banner of the beautiful Constantia, gazed in silent awe upon the magnificent vision of the Amazon, now on the prancing steed before their eyes; they firmly believed that the soul of her famous mother was re-incarnated in the person of Cahina.

Cornelius gave the order to march; and, as the army moved forward, Cahina maintained her position beside him at its center. To him she was positive and emphatic in predicting a glorious victory for her army. She spoke as if this prediction of a future event had been inspired by some Higher Power, some decree beyond question. She cautioned Cornelius to be careful; not to expose himself rashly to danger.

When the center of the army arrived at the edge of the desert, Cahina ordered a halt. She raised her hand for silence, and in clear tones addressed those within the sound of her voice:

"Here, at the threshold of the desert, my supremacy over the army ceases. I am but a woman, and unused to warfare; yet I intend to fight at thy side in the ranks,

under the eye of this experienced Commander, who will lead us to a glorious victory."

Raising her mailed arm toward heaven, while a supernatural light gleamed in her lustrous eye, she continued, in solemn, oracular manner: "Soldiers, hearken to my voice! I know whereof I speak, and let my words fire thy hearts with courage. The decree of Fate has doomed these brigands of the desert. Thou wilt surprise and overwhelm each division of their army. Nearly all will be slain. Few will return to their despot Caliph to tell the tale. Now, if there be one among you with a coward heart, who fears to strike for his home, his country, and his Queen, or one who doubts the fulfilment of my prophecy, he has my permission to return home and to remain among the women."

A dead silence followed. Not a man stirred in the ranks. Suddenly their feelings found relief in a great shout: "Hail, our Prophetess-Queen! Hail! we believe thy prediction, and we will follow thy chosen Commander to victory or to death."

Every eye turned toward Cornelius with an expression of trust and confidence.

"'Tis well," she cried, intense satisfaction plainly visible on her features. "I know that thou art resolved to conquer or die for thy Queen and thy country. I now invoke the blessings of the gods upon thy heads; thy gods will vouchsafe to those unfortunately slain in battle, a seat with them among the mighty, where everlasting joy awaits them. Those who return victorious, will receive the plaudits of a grateful Queen and of his Nation, and will share alike in the distribution of the rich treasures taken from the camp of the enemy."

With these assuring words she galloped to the position occupied by the Berber cavalry, where she assumed command. Her passage was marked by the wildest enthusiasm and the most extravagant utterances of the soldiers. In that position she remained throughout. She intended that Cornelius should assume the entire responsibility for the expedition and its consequences. She did not speak to him again during the march; but when his duties made it necessary for him to pass her, she saluted him in like manner as the other officers.

Cornelius had despatched scouts to reconnoiter the country far in advance of his army. At evening they returned and reported that the Moslems were at Ouad-Nini, within a few hours' march. Cornelius commanded a halt, that the men might rest before making an attack. By his orders also no fires were lighted, and absolute silence prevailed in the camp.

Thus they remained until after midnight. Then Cornelius saw that it would not be advisable to restrain their ardor any longer, so he gave command for a general advance. The scouts started off at the head of the columns, and the army marched noiselessly over the pathless, desolate waste, only the occasional clank of their weapons being heard.

As Cornelius had calculated, and hoped, the enemy, feeling secure in their bivouac in the vast solitude of the desert, neglected to follow their usual precaution,—stationing sentinels round their camp. Thus Cahina's army was able to approach closely without detection.

Cornelius divided his forces into detachments. These closed in from every side, and soon surrounded the unsuspecting Moslem army.

When all was in readiness, the trumpets pealed forth the signal of attack. From the ranks of her soldiers arose a wild shout: "Cahina live and rule forever! Death to the Moslem dogs!"

Then, with the irresistible force of a mighty, raging torrent, the army of Cahina rushed upon the sleeping foe, dealing death on every side, and covering the dark desert with mounds of wounded and slain Arabs. Many were killed before they could raise a hand in defense. Others were cut down as they groped in the darkness for their weapons. The slaughter continued unabated, the attacking legions hewing and hacking their way through the outer edges of the Moslem camp, and toward the heart of it, where was pitched the tent of its Commanding-general, the intrepid Khaled, son of Islam's fiercest warrior—Khaled, called "the sword of Allah."

While the soldiers of Cahina's army had an easy task when beginning the butchery of the first division of Hassan's army, their march of death and destruction was now stayed, and they began to fall before the furious defense of the Arabs. Spearmen and warriors wielding javelins were laid low in scores; for Khaled had concentrated the remnant of his forces.

He could then see nothing on which to base a hope for escape; he realized that he must soon succumb to the overwhelming force against which he was pitted, or yield himself and his men as prisoners. He preferred death to surrender. Standing unmoved in the very center of the awful scene of carnage, he offered up a prayer to Allah and Mohammed his Prophet.

Then he appealed to his men to die bravely, as true

Moslems, for their religion and its founder, who would reward their sacrifice of life with perpetual joy in the seventh heaven ; there they would be seated under his throne, and drink of the waters of Cawthar, the "River of Life," and eating of Tuba, the "Tree of Happiness." Khaled reminded them that even these celestial glories would be surpassed by the resplendent and ravishing houris, whose eternal companionship in the pavilion of pearls, would be the joy of the faithful who perished in the cause of the true religion.

The short exhortation of their young and austere Commander incited his soldiers to the highest pitch of fanatical valor. Every one was willing to sell his life to gain entrance to "Janat al Naim," the "Garden of Pleasure," where he could revel in ecstatic bliss in the hall of pearls, with the black-eyed houris. As they formed a solid phalanx around their leader, the Moslem warriors shouted rapturously:

"Allah is great! Allah is merciful! Son of the glorious Khaled, our lives are in thy hands. Lead us to victory, or to the everlasting life in the beautiful garden of Janat."

The first attack had been made by the foot-soldiers, Cornelius deeming it better to hold the Berber cavalry in reserve, that they might pursue the enemy if the Arabs should attempt to escape; but now the dawn was breaking, and the horsemen were well-nigh beside themselves with rage and grief, fearing lest the battle would be over before they could have a part in the slaughter. But they obeyed the Queen's order and did not move from the position to which the Commanding-general had assigned them. But as he was dashing

past the division, Cahina stopped him, and in her blazing eyes he saw that the lust of slaughter possessed her, too. She demanded that her division be given an opportunity to do its part in the fight. To him it was plain that she was eager to receive a fiery baptism in the clash of battle, and so he directed her to order her men to make a dash against the center of the Moslem camp, and capture Khaled and his rich treasure.

Cahina gave the necessary command, and dashed ahead. The savage Berber horsemen followed the impetuous rush of their Queen, on ground wet with the blood of the slain, and riding over piles of dead. No obstacle could arrest their mad rush, and they descended on the Moslems in a fierce onslaught.

With calm dignity and composure Khaled met their advance; he rallied his devoted band around him. Cahina, just then, hurled her forces against the square, which bristled with spears and simitars. Down went the front rank of the Moslems; down tumbled many horsemen. Even while lying on the ground, the sorely wounded and dying enemies sought, with the little life and strength remaining, to kill each other.

The Moslem soldiers, knowing well that if they were defeated not a man of them would be spared, fought with the ferocity of tigers. The gigantic mountaineers dealt terrific blows with their heavy swords, but for every man who fell under their attack another equally fearless took his place in the lines. Many of the wounded Moslems, dying on the ground, used the last remnant of their strength to poke their simitars upward, and thus hamstring the horses, and wound the riders as they toppled to the ground beside them.

Despite the tremendous charges, the death-dealing swords of the Berber horsemen, and the fact that their comrades were every moment being mowed down like sheaves of grain, the Arab warriors were undismayed; they stood boldly to receive the repeated shocks of the cavalry. Their flag still flew defiantly in the center of the square.

At the head of her forces Cahina repeatedly dashed against the Moslems; her boldest warrior displayed no greater heroism. Her conspicuous leadership in dazzling armor made her a shining mark for the Moslem javelin-throwers; hundreds of these sharp weapons were hurled at the dashing Amazon leader. But she seemed to bear a charmed life: most of the javelins flew wide of the mark, and the few that struck her, rolled harmless as feathers from her bright armor. Her seeming immunity from danger inspired her superstitious followers with fresh courage. In proportion as the Berbers were elated at the Queen's miraculous escape, so the Mohammedans were depressed.

Khaled saw a glimmer of hope in the death or, at least, the capture of Cahina, the life-spring of this relentless torrent.

"My brethren," he shouted in stentorian tones, "see ye yon witch of Eblis,—yon sorceress,—Queen of the infidel dogs? We must, by the favor of our great Prophet, capture her. She will then become our hostage, and the Christian general of the idolaters will, in exchange for her, permit us to withdraw with honor from the field; but if you cannot capture her alive, then slay her like a dog!"

"Allah is great, and Mahomet is his Prophet!"

shouted the devout survivors; then, with fury and fanatical bravery, they hurled themselves upon the mass of savage horsemen, with intent to seize the Queen.

From his post of observation Cornelius saw the dangerous situation in which Cahina was placed. He endeavored to force his way through the dense ranks of cavalry to be close to her; but ere he could reach her side a stalwart Moslem seized the bridle of her horse, while another herculean Arab grasped her arm and was dragging her out of the saddle before she could realize what was going on.

"Blasphemous witch!" he shouted. "Yield thee, or I will send thy soul to Eblis."

The Moslem soldiers yelled with joy.

Cahina's followers seemed paralyzed at the success of the desperate effort of the Arabs. For a moment it seemed as if the Queen were doomed.

Then, faster than the deadly breath of the simoon sweeping over the desert, a horseman of giant frame, the visor of his helmet concealing his face, dashed to the rescue of the Queen. He trampled spearmen under foot and knocked horsemen right and left, to open a path. One sweep of his keen sword, and the hand of the Moslem holding the bridle was slashed off. The unknown then wheeled, and drove his weapon through the body of the Arab tugging at Cahina's arms,—and the Queen was safe.

Without excitement, and displaying no sign of fear, Cahina calmly resumed her seat in the saddle, exclaiming: "A thousand thanks, my bold champion. Thy name, that I——"

Ere she could finish the sentence, her horse staggered



A HORSEMAN OF GIGANTIC FRAME DASHED TO THE RESCUE OF THE QUEEN.

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and fell, having been hamstrung by the Arab whose hand had been cut off. Encumbered by her armor, Cahina was unable to extricate herself from the harness of the falling horse. She dropped heavily upon the sands, stunned and badly bruised.

When the Moslem soldiers saw the Berber Queen lying prostrate on the sands, they yelled in maniacal fury: "Death to the pagan witch!" And under the impulse of religious frenzy they rushed toward the spot where the Queen was lying, regardless of the fact that the Berber cavalry, greatly outnumbering them, were galloping forward to stem their reckless charge; but the invaders, animated by the single idea that Cahina must be secured, alive or dead, pressed forward, heedless of all obstacles and dangers.

The Moslems and the mountain Berbers reached the objective point at the same moment. As the cavalry dashed against them the Arabs drove their trenchant spears straight into the faces of the advancing legion. Many of the horsemen fell lifeless from their steeds, pierced through the eyes and foreheads. The cavalry, recoiling from the deadly shower of steel, was thrown into much confusion, and seemed about to retreat; when the unknown, who was kneeling at the side of the unconscious Queen, sprang to his feet, brandished his blood-stained sword, and shouted, in tones that were heard above the din of battle:

"Shame on ye, cowards! would ye desert your Queen, and let her fall into the clutches of the demons of hell? Open your ranks, that I may bear the Queen to the rear, and charge ye then fearlessly, and sweep the hounds from the earth."

Stung to shame by the taunt of the unknown, the horsemen instantly recovered from their momentary confusion, and once more they swooped down upon the enemy; but, as they dashed on, they swerved to the right and to the left, leaving an open space around their fallen Queen, to whom they bowed low in passing. With such skill did they exercise this maneuver, that she was not grazed by the flank of a single horse.

Soon the din of the conflict, now a desperate hand-to-hand struggle, brought Cahina back to consciousness. Unable to stand alone, still faint and dazed, she, at the gentle request of her preserver, placed her head against his shoulder, and an arm round his neck for support. Thus was the Queen led like a child from the storm of battle.

Khaled had seen the attempts of his followers to seize Cahina, and her final rescue. Fearing lest she was about to escape him altogether, he cried out:

"The Sorceress-Queen is escaping through her horsemen. Follow her, and when you reach her, slay her like a wild beast. Should you fall, the gates of Paradise await you!"

As Khaled finished, a score of his more desperate followers leaped among the prancing steeds of the Berbers. They dodged and crawled between the hoofs of the horses and under their bellies; over carcasses of horses and the bodies of the slain.

Fiercely the Berbers attacked these bold fanatics, who, undismayed by sword-thrusts, made every effort to reach the object of their vengeance. One after another they paid for their rashness with their lives, until only a single member of the band was left. Snake-like he

writhed his way beneath the horses. Though hundreds of blows were struck at him, and horses were skilfully handled to strike him down, none injured him, until, at last he succeeded in reaching the object of his hatred. From a hundred throats arose a shout of warning. But ere the Queen or her conductor could turn to discover the cause of the sudden alarm, the Arab, emitting a shout of joy, leaped forward, and with a short dagger struck the Queen a terrific blow between the shoulders.

She fell forward, and, as she struck the ground, he sprang upon her, and deliberately severed the cord that attached the helmet to her armor. He was about to thrust his keen dagger into her neck, when the unknown grasped his arm, and held it firmly.

The Arab struggled wildly to break away from his adversary, but his attempt was futile; he was held as in a vise. The horsemen, rushing by, could not stop, because of the pressure of those behind, so that the two men, equally matched in size and strength, were left to struggle as if alone on the desert. The Arab writhed and twisted; the other stood still as a statue. He dared not exert his full strength, fearing that during the struggle the Queen might be bruised or crushed; for the Arab still clutched the opening he had made in her helmet. The Moslem realized the situation, and grinned malignantly. He knew his life was already forfeited. He had nothing to lose, and, with dogged perseverance, he continued his efforts to free his right hand.

Fearing that Cahina had been seriously injured, Cornelius had despatched one of his staff to ascertain her whereabout. He soon reported that she had been taken

to the rear. Cornelius made a circuit round the flying cavalry, and noticed Cahina lying on the ground, the Arab and the Berber struggling over her. Hurrying to the scene, he saw the dagger in the hand of the Moslem stopped in its murderous descent by the noble Berber. The situation was clear to him.

He hesitated to strike the Arab, lest he might injure Cahina or her protector; so he leaped from his horse, seized a battle-ax that had been dropped on the field, and with a single blow split the skull of the Moslem, as one breaks a walnut. The body rolled off to one side, yet the fingers did not relax their grip, but clutched the edge of her helmet. Cornelius took up the dagger, dropped by the Moslem, and severed the fingers from the hand, thus releasing the grasp of the dead.

A litter of spears was formed, and the Queen was laid tenderly upon it, and carried to the tent of the priest-doctor. Soon her women attendants were summoned, and she was left to their loving care.

Cornelius, after ordering the unknown to remain outside the tent and guard the Queen, returned to the scene of carnage. Heaps of dead, Moslems and Berbers alike, were piled on the ground. The Arabs were slowly succumbing to the inevitable. Khaled, standing beside the sacred standard of Islam, broke his sword's scabbard, and cast it at the foot of his banner. He still exhorted his men to make the most of this great chance for Paradise.

They were soon cut down to a handful, but they clung to the sacred standard with the left hand, while they wielded their weapons with their right.

Countless blows were aimed at the head of the

Moslem general. Many of them would have proved fatal had not Khaled's followers, shouting "Paradise, Paradise," interposed their bodies and received the deadly blows intended for him. Finally all were slain; Khaled alone was left of the heroic band. Clinging to the sacred banner, he defiantly brandished his sword, now crimson with Berber blood. The Amgar and his horde swooped down upon the solitary Moslem, with swords uplifted, to hack him to pieces. But there was one man in Cahina's army whom the grand courage of the Arab leader stirred deeply.

"Halt!" Cornelius cried, to the maddened host. "Capture him alive." The impetuous torrent of Berbers was arrested for an instant. "Yield thee, and save thy life!" he shouted.

Khaled's countenance, radiant with contentment, was already assuming that celestial calm that precedes the final dissolution.

"A true believer never yields to infidel dogs!" he retorted.

With his last word a howl of rage went up from the savage Berbers, and a dozen swords pierced his body.

Commanding the soldiers to take a rest and some refreshment before advancing against the second division of the Moslem invaders, Cornelius seized the brief interval to search for the wounded Queen. He found her comfortably resting on soft rugs in the tent to which she had been carried. Her armor had been removed, and she was habited in the garments of her sex. The priest-doctor and two of her women were in attendance. The unknown warrior paced in front of her tent, guarding the entrance.

Her face lighted up when she saw Cornelius enter, and she impetuously demanded news from the field of battle. He told her that the pride of the Crescent was lowered in the dust, and that the victory over the first division was complete. He also described the heroic valor and death of Khaled.

"Such bravery," she commented, "was unworthy of so base a cause; but fervently do I thank the gods and thee for this brilliant victory. Lose now no time, my noble Cornelius, in overtaking and annihilating the remaining division."

In reply to his inquiries as to the extent of her injuries, she informed him that the dagger of the assassin failed to break through the steel links of her armor, and therefore inflicted only a slight flesh-wound; otherwise, with the exception of a few bruises, she was uninjured. Cornelius devoutly thanked God for her miraculous escape.

His spontaneous prayer of gratitude seemed to make a deep impression on Cahina; for when he had finished, she said:

"Thou must tell me more of thy God when the war is over and we are again dwelling happily in the palace at Constantine. And there is one more service thou must render me," she continued, "ere thou goest on the second expedition against these Moslem brigands. My conscience is heavy with a debt of gratitude to the noble warrior who thrice saved my life from the attacks of the Moslems. With self-abnegation he has guarded my tent, without food or drink. Bid him enter, and when he has partaken of refreshment, ascertain the name of my preserver."

Cornelius summoned the unknown, and ordered that he be supplied with wine and meat. The champion of the Queen raised the visor to his mouth, and ate and drank with avidity. The upper part of his face remained concealed.

"Why dost thou not remove thy helmet?" asked Cornelius courteously. "One who has, with such bravery, saved the Queen's life, needs not to be ashamed to show his face."

"Our noble Queen," replied the unknown, in subdued tones with a tremor of suppressed emotion, "cares not to see the face of one she despises—"

"Nay," Cahina interrupted. "Thy offense, whatever it is, cannot be so great as not to have been effaced by thine ennobling deeds in thrice rescuing me from death. I pray thee remove thy helmet, as now thou hast full pardon for any past short-comings.

"If that be so," joyously cried the unknown, "I willingly comply," and, thus saying, he quickly turned up the visor of his helmet, and revealed—the handsome features of Rezin.

The Queen laughed merrily, and exclaimed: "By all the gods! It is Rezin, the rake; Rezin, the former leader of bacchanalian feasts, now a doughty warrior; Rezin, the former patron of frivolous women, has become the protector and champion of the Queen who banished him."

The young man could not determine whether the Queen was speaking in contempt or was making sport of him. His face showed his distress, and he was about to justify himself, when Cahina interrupted him.

"Nay, Rezin, do not look so sad; for I meant no

offense. I am profoundly grateful, and I owe to thee my very existence at this moment. Thy noble struggle for thy country, and the heroic preservation of thy Queen, obliterate all thy past follies, and, as a mark of my favor, I appoint thee an officer of my body-guard."

Rezin fell on his knees, and confusedly muttered words of thanks, while the tears in his eyes were eloquent testimony to the depth of his feeling.

Ordering Rezin to accompany him, Cornelius bade the Queen farewell, reminding her that the victorious troops were waiting for him to lead them to a second victory, and that he was eager to strike while the lust for Moslem blood was on them. Wistfully she gazed at him. She seemed somehow disappointed.

"The welfare of the kingdom is paramount," she said, after a moment. "Farewell, and may the god of war again crown thine efforts with victory."

Cornelius had ascertained that the second division of the Moslem army was commanded by the famous Hassan in person, and, fearing that the Arab commander might receive information of the annihilation of the first division, from some soldier that had escaped in the confusion, he ordered his cavalry to push swiftly in the direction of the remaining division of the Moslems.

At dusk, on the following day, Cornelius and his soldiers discovered the enemy, and, as he had feared, they were in full retreat. Before darkness set in, the pursuers had caught up with the rear columns of the fleeing army. They fell upon the Arabs, and, though the voice of Emir Hassan rang out in words of encouragement that roused the fanatical fury of his men and made them fight like demons, they could make no head-

way against the overwhelming numbers, and they were mercilessly cut down. By the exercise of great skill and cunning, Hassan escaped, with about a thousand veterans, shouting vengeance as they fled.

Thus perished a seasoned army forty thousand strong, the flower of the Arabian forces, crushed by a body of comparatively undisciplined soldiers, inspired by love of their Prophetess-Queen.

When the victory was complete, Cornelius despatched an officer to the Queen to herald the tidings of triumph, and to convey to her the congratulations of the Commanding-general on the fact that she now possessed undisputed sway over the whole north of Africa, from the confines of Egypt to the Atlantic Ocean.

After an easy march of several days, the army, with the rich booty captured from the Arabs, arrived at Constantine. The populace received the returned victors with wild and extravagant demonstrations of joy. For ten days the city was given up to feasting and revelry. Public and private festivals marked the celebration, and in the amphitheaters were produced each night spectacular pageants, representing the wild scenes of the battle, to the great honor and glory of the heroic Queen and her army. In these scenes of rejoicing, Cornelius, who next to the Queen had become the idol of the populace, shared the honors with his sovereign.

In addition to the secular demonstrations made in honor of the victors, religious festivals were held in the numerous temples of worship. The priests offered up devout thanks to their images for vouchsafing so glorious a victory to the armies of their beloved Queen; simple prayers of thanks were chanted in all the Jewish

synagogues for the delivery of Cahina from the hands of her enemies; even the worshipers of the little Christian church, in the outskirts of the city, rendered gratitude to the Lord of Hosts for the salvation of the noble Queen and her kingdom. Yet a remarkable feature of this period of feasting and thanksgiving was, that the Queen took no part in the public demonstration.

When Cahina, who had previously returned to the capital, received from Cornelius tidings of the destruction of the Moslem army, with the exception of Hassan and a thousand soldiers who had escaped, she immediately shut herself up in her apartments and became invisible to all; but she instructed her slaves that when Cornelius returned he should be promptly ushered into her presence.

Therefore, on his arrival in Constantine, he was at once conducted to her chamber. There a sad sight met his eyes. Expecting to behold an imperious Queen, radiant with joy at the complete overthrow of the invaders that had tried to wrest the scepter from her hand, he found, to his astonishment, a frail woman, languidly reclining on a divan in a darkened room; her countenance pale and haggard, her hair disheveled, and her eyes showing traces of weeping. To him she seemed even more beautiful in this mood of sadness.

When Cornelius entered, she sprang up, and, taking his hand, tenderly led him to the divan, made a sign for him to be seated, and then dropping down beside him, she fixed her luminous eyes on his.

He felt her absolute control. He was deeply touched by her great distress. Impulsively he seized her hand, and, in burning language, he told her that, even

if his head should the next moment pay the penalty for his rashness, she was the most beautiful woman in the world; that he loved her with all his soul.

Meeting with no repulse, he gained courage, and entwined an arm round her waist; and when not rebuffed at this, his presumption rose higher, and he leaned forward and his lips met hers in a lingering kiss.

"I love thee, my Queen, my enchantress," again he murmured, "but, alas, with the hopelessness of despair; for I am far beneath thy station."

She did not disengage herself, but, resting in his embrace, she looked fondly into his eyes, and simply answered his love's avowal with the words; "To me all things are possible."

"Oh, Cornelius, light of my life," she cried, after a time, "our troth gives thee a right to inquire why thou dost find me in the depths of sadness, when all around me are happy and rejoicing. Since thy message of victory, the sun's cheerful rays have not penetrated this chamber, and scarcely has food passed my lips, nor slumber visited my eyelids. I am indeed bowed down with sorrow and gloomy apprehension. In thy message thou didst say, with joyous heart, that the Moslem defeat gave me undisputed sway over the whole north of Africa, from Egypt to the ocean. So far thou art correct, but alas! I fear that this sway will be but of short duration.

Cornelius sought to comfort her, but smiling sadly, with upraised hand, she urged him to silence.

"Far be it from me to reproach thee," she continued, "or to deprecate the prowess of my chosen one; but thou canst perceive that with the escape of Hassan, thy

victory is hollow, incomplete, and barren. His death or capture was more vital to the welfare of my kingdom than the destruction of ten Arabian legions. Knowest thou not his implacable and revengeful nature? He is the favorite of the Caliph, and in him peace will find no resting-place until the stigma of his defeat is effaced by my destruction. The Caliph will refuse him no opportunity to retrieve his great disgrace, and my soul forbodes disaster and ruin; therefore have I, in gloom and sadenss, isolated myself from the joyous throng, and here await the appearance of my good genii, who will reveal to me the means of escape from the threatened calamity. But, alas! I seemingly wait in vain; for no vision has as yet appeared, and my mind still wanders in doubt and darkness; yet the inner senses of my soul foretell that my protecting spirit will soon become visible, and even now I feel its celestial influence hovering near me. Hourly it draws nearer, and may at any moment present itself to my longing spirit; until then, I continue to wait in solitude and darkness."

She ceased, and regarded him fixedly for a moment, when suddenly she seemed overcome by an outburst of fierce passion; for she seized his head between her hands and kissed him repeatedly. Then she pressed a cheek against his.

"Oh, Cornelius," she whispered softly, "sunshine of my life, the oasis in the desert of my loveless existence. It matters not what the result of the conflict with my relentless foe shall be, my love for thee will never perish, neither in this life nor in the life beyond." She kissed him again upon the brow and lips; then arose, took his hand gently in hers, and led him to the door.

"I am loath," she said, "to have thee depart;" for, though these moments of felicity may be repeated, I am unable to repress the gloomy boding that the fulfilment of my duties to my dear country will soon force me to pass through a trying ordeal that may postpone our nuptials for a time, and perhaps prevent them forever. Go now, and return seven days hence and learn my determination."

In despondent mood he sought his chamber. For the Queen he felt mingled feelings of pity and affection. But when he was away from her presence, the peculiar influence she exerted over him seemed to vanish, and he experienced a feeling of self-abasement for his involuntary surrender to the spell. He waited patiently for the week to elapse before he could again see Cahina, and learn from her what determination she had made as to her own future and the future of her beloved country.

*Chapter Eleven.*

## The Destruction of Constantine.

ON the seventh day thereafter Cornelius received from the Queen a message, in which she regretted she would be unable to receive him that evening. It was accompanied by a Royal command to Cornelius to summon all her ministers, the chief dignitaries, the commanders of the army, and the nobility to attend a Royal feast on the third night following, in the Roman banquet-hall of the palace, to celebrate the victory over the Mohammedan army.

This beautiful room had been constructed by order of the Roman general, Belisarius, while he was Governor of Africa, in imitation of the luxurious banqueting halls of Rome. Cahina had never used it, as she greatly disliked the Roman fashion of reclining on couches while eating. But, for many days preparations had been going on under the Queen's directions, to make the hall ready for the most superb feast that the country could possibly make.

On the appointed night the order was given to throw the Belisarius Room open for the first time, for the purpose for which it had been originally intended.

Great was the astonishment of the leading men of the kingdom when they received the summons through

Cornelius. Their wonder grew until the very hour for assembling in the hall, where they freely gave it voice. They marveled at the splendors before them—the tessellated black-and-red pavement, the gilded walls, the profusion of beautiful marble columns, and the groined ceilings. The hall was brilliantly illuminated with a roseate light, shed from hundreds of lamps, under which were suspended exquisitely formed censers of gold, in which burning perfumes exhaled fragrant vapors. It was a veritable banquet of the senses. The beauty of the hall, and the taste and splendor of the decorations, appealed to the sight; the sense of smell was held captive by the exquisite odors, that transformed the room into a rose-garden of Araby. Delightful music, rendered by skilled musicians of the realm, as the feast progressed, showed that the ear, too, was invited to take active part.

Upon ebony couches with silver frames, covered with rare shawls and soft cushions, the guests reclined. Between the two immense crescent-shaped tables, made of citron wood, and inlaid with ivory, stood a great bronze fountain, the triumph of some art-genius. It represented the god Neptune; and from it spurted jets of scented water, which cooled and perfumed the air.

Never before had there been such a feast in the kingdom. Mountain and plain and sea had been relentlessly laid under tribute to surrender their best toward supplying the sumptuous board. Nubian slaves, in spotless white, kept at the elbows of the guests, and filled their golden flagons as rapidly as they were emptied. A powerful Egyptian wine was served—a wine so strong that in Egypt, only men were allowed to drink it.

Under its benign and stimulating influence the feasters soon gave themselves up to boisterous mirth.

When the merriment was at its height, a herald announced the approach of the Queen. She appeared, —a vision of beauty,—radiantly attired in robes of State, a jeweled diadem upon her brow. Attending her were the ministers of the kingdom and the military chiefs of the victorious army, Cornelius at their head. When she beheld the motley assemblage, accustomed to squatting on mats, now awkwardly lolling on couches and quaffing strong wine, in weak imitation of those voluptuous Romans that held their ancestors in bondage, her proud lips involuntarily curled in derision. She seated herself in the Royal chair, reserved for her, which was raised above the others and at the center of one of the tables; with queenly dignity she bade her guests a cordial welcome. Cornelius had the seat of honor at her right hand, and Hormusjee at her left.

As the feast proceeded, the Moors, Berbers, and Bedouins cried more loudly for flagons of fiery ecobalda. They quaffed large quantities of this wine of Egypt, and their faces became flushed, their eyes sparkled, and their tongues grew more and more free. The temporary restraint because of the presence of Royalty gradually vanished. In proportion as the wine was consumed, their conviviality increased. They became more hilarious, and their voices rose louder and louder; the buzz of conversation grew into a tumult of noise and confusion. Finally one of the Berber mountain-chiefs arose and whirled his goblet about his head.

"Twine a wreath round your cups," he shouted, "and drink with me to the glory of our great Marabout

Queen. She it was who led us to victory, and she it was who predicted so truly that we would crush the Mohammedan fanatics, and drive out of the land those who escaped death. May the gods grant our great Queen and Prophetess a glorious life and a reign of more than a hundred years, and give her many children and grandchildren, and true friends while walking through a long life."

All present rose to their feet and wildly shouted their endorsement of the Amgar's sentiment, till the very arches seemed to ring with the echo. His exploit was received with so much favor by the others that, not satisfied with mere approval, they became fired with the desire to emulate his example; and so the chief of each tribe felt it incumbent upon him to pledge a sentiment to the Queen's health.

After this, all fell to singing and shouting, and laughing boisterously. The Queen viewed this scene of dissipation with serenity and composure, and, by her attitude, she even seemed in a strange way tacitly to encourage them to drink still deeper and to become more hilarious. She turned to Cornelius with a sad smile on her lips, and the light of love in her eyes.

"When I compare thee, my Cornelius," said she, "with these unbridled spirits, then indeed art thou the pride of my soul, and I love thee even more, if that were possible, for thy temperance and moderation. Greatly would I prefer a simple repast with thee, where we could sweetly beguile the time with dreams of love and future bliss. But oh! beloved, the happy hour is approaching when our souls will be united. Tell me, Cornelius, how is it that men so brave and

dashing in battle, can be transformed into such gluttons and wine-bibbers as we now behold them? I feel that in the hour of the country's crisis no dependence can be placed on such men. Something desperate must be done to check their vices, that I may hold them within my control in the hour of necessity, should the Moslems attempt another invasion."

Without waiting for a reply to her questions, which seemed to be spoken merely for the relief that comes from expression, the Queen lapsed into silence.

Cornelius had a vague, irritating consciousness of some coming tragedy, a strange foreboding he could not shake off. Why had Cahina ordered this orgy? Why had she, who could not look upon the scene without horror and disgust, herself encouraged it? But his mind seemed to swim in a sea of unanswered "whys"—and he merely waited.

The wine circulated still faster among the guests. Some of them became furiously excited from its fumes; while others were mercifully made somnolent, and fell forward on the table, adding the bass note of their audible sleep to the tumult. Louder and still louder became the uproar. As the bottles were emptied and the guests became filled, higher and higher rose the excitement, until at last the scene became nothing short of a roaring debauch of those whom a few short hours had transformed from men into beasts.

The Queen, who for some time had been growing restless, as if holding herself under control by a strenuous effort of the will, arose impatiently, then reseated herself, as if facing some supreme duty.

"I can endure this disgraceful sight no longer," she

said sharply, turning to Hormusjee. "Go at once to the vaults, and see that all is prepared."

The priest hastened away. In a few moments he returned, and signified to the Queen that all preparations had been completed as she desired.

Cahina in an instant became strangely animated. Like one inspired she sprang to her feet. She stood for a moment, as if seeking to attract the attention of her guests. With flashing eyes and with profound contempt and righteous anger in her voice, she cried:

"Hold! hold! ye men of Mauritania. Cease this shameful uproar, else ye and the Nation perish in this vortex of your vices. Even now the spirit of my warrior ancestress appears before mine eyes. Behold!" and with the word she stamped violently upon the floor, and stretched a white arm toward the fountain.

Every eye, whether maddened or dulled by the fiery wines, was instinctively directed toward the fountain. And even as they looked, the lights were extinguished suddenly, and the hall was plunged in darkness. A strange uncanny silence fell upon the assemblage. For a moment the rhythmical plashing of the water, falling in the fountain, and the labored breathing of the distressed wine-bibbers were the only sounds. To the guests, the sudden change from brilliancy and hilarity to utter darkness and dread silence was appalling.

A loud, crashing sound broke the awful stillness. Then, as if by magic, a mellow light appeared around the fountain. In rapid succession, streams of dazzling colored fire shot up from the center of it, and formed a rainbow arch at the top. The assemblage was spellbound at what, to their superstitious minds, seemed a

manifestation by the Fire-god. They reclined motionless on the couches, not even daring to move. The fumes of the wines were partly dispelled; their addled brains became clearer. They were more deeply moved as their straining eyes saw the fire gradually change color until, to their unspeakable horror, it seemed that the fountain was spurting streams of blood. Then, becoming terror-stricken beyond all control, they rolled off the luxurious couches to the floor, prostrating themselves helplessly in the climax of their fear.

"Oh, great Prophetess!" they cried, in tremulous tones, "have pity; do not destroy us, mighty Queen, and daughter of the gods. Let thy celestial light again shine upon us."

Upon hearing this, the voice of the Queen rang out in solemn and awesome tones.

"Peace!" she exclaimed. "Even now, from the fountain of blood, my guardian spirit commands me to exhort you to hearken to the divine commands of the god of fire, who speaks to the Nation through me. Hear ye! the discomfiture and retreat of our Moslem enemy is but temporary; its armies will soon return with increased forces. The wealth of our cities, the treasures of silver and gold dug from the earth, the fruits of our gardens and orchards, the produce of our fields attract to our land these Arab despoilers. But there is still one hope for the Nation and for my beloved people."

The attention of the listening host grew intense as she spoke of but one hope remaining between them and destruction.

"To me the gods have granted a vision," she continued, in a voice vibrant with emotion, "in which was

marked plainly the path we are to follow in this crisis. In their great wisdom they have shown me a way wherein may be destroyed the desire of the Arabs to prey upon our rich country. This means would seem to us of earth a severe and painful measure, yet the gods reveal that it will ultimately be of the greatest benefit, and redound to the glory of the Nation. Therefore they command you, through me, to destroy your cities, and to bury in their ruins the pernicious treasures that excite the greed of the Moslems.

"It is further ordained by the gods, whose wisdom no true believer will question, that you fell your fruit trees, lay waste your fields, and spread a barrier of desolation between ye and the country of these robbers, that their avarice be destitute of temptation, and that they cease to disturb our tranquillity. And when they have learned that the country can yield them no booty, they will seek elsewhere, and forget. Then will our glorious country again blossom and flourish, and be grander, more beautiful, and more powerful than before."

As Cahina delivered her divine exhortation, her eyes were glazed, and were staring at the fountain. When she ceased to speak, she stood rigid, and waited a moment to give the awe-stricken guests an opportunity to realize fully what she had told them. Then she demanded that they tell her at once if they were prepared to comply with the edicts of the gods.

Thoroughly inspired with superstitious fears, and laboring under the spell cast upon them by the miracle of fire, they cried out frantically and loudly, as if fearing the gods might not hear their prompt response: "The word of the gods, as revealed through thee, great

Prophetess, is our law. Command as thou wilt; we obey thee blindly in all things."

Cahina was too wise to grant her superstitious followers an instant's time for reflection. She knew the pyschologic moment had come. She commanded Hormusjee to fetch a torch, and to order all the Nubian slaves to come with sledges and axes to begin the work of destruction. She seized the torch, and with it directed the burly negroes in all the details of their patriotic vandalism.

As one dominated by a superior power, she led them from one place to another as they smashed to pieces the rich tables and other articles of furniture; tore down and slashed rich draperies, ruined magnificent statues with their sledges; hacked and hewed the noble throne-chair, but lately occupied by their Queen, and destroyed every other movable thing in the hall in whatever way their ingenuity and the frenzy of destruction could suggest. The great mass of débris was piled together in the form of a huge funeral pyre, into which they threw all the gold and silver plates, vases, flagons, costly dishes, and ornaments—all the highest tangible evidences of a great civilization.

As they finished, the Queen strode forward; with the frenzy of one inspired she tore the jeweled diadem from her brow, madly stripped off all her precious jewels and ornaments of gold, tore loose her magnificent robes of State, and in seeming delirium tossed them all upon the heap.

This done, she gazed upon the assemblage, now overpowered by the great tragedy enacting before them.

"Noble patriots," she shouted, in a tone of supreme




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command, "follow the example of thy Sovereign in complying with the dictates of thy gods."

For response, the men, scarcely knowing what they did, ran forward, tearing from their persons all jewelry and valuable ornaments, and hurling them into the heap. They even threw their purses of gold into the pyre, and fought furiously, and some were even trampled under foot, in their insane haste to be among the first to sacrifice their possessions at the Queen's command.

The floor near the tables was strewn with broken dishes and fragments of the feast. To make the confusion greater, pools of wine from broken bottles made slippery places on the tiled floor, where the slaves stumbled as they rushed hither and thither.

The streams of blood-colored fire still rose from the fountain,—with the exception of the torch held by Cahina, the one light on this awful scene of destruction,—making it seem like an inferno. The gorgeous banquet-hall, but a few moments before resplendent in its decorations and furnishings, and teeming with life and gaiety, was now dismantled, and ruined.

Those who had been laughing and shouting in the exuberance of their happiness, now stood in terror too great for words, their tense, drawn faces uplifted to the Queen. What frightful thing would happen next? What other great sacrifice would be demanded of them, in the name of the gods, by their Sorceress-Queen? They trembled in the fear that she might ask even the sacrifice of their lives.

But with a swift whirl of the torch she set at rest that fear. Hormusjee sprinkled a white powder on one side of the pile of débris, and to this powder Cahina

applied the torch. Instantly a bright blaze was kindled, and the dazed and bewildered guests watched the first thin line of fire grow into a tongue of flame, that curled rapidly round the pile, until it burst forth into a fierce, blazing crater, shooting up columns of smoke and flame to the beautiful arched ceiling. This soon sputtered with the heat, and then became ignited.

The awed and terror-stricken people gazed stupidly on the weird scene. With a mere latent animal instinct, involuntarily, and scarce knowing what they were doing, they retreated to the doors. Still, like children loath to leave their toys behind, they lingered at the threshold, reluctant to sacrifice their precious ornaments to the flames, which had now seized upon the structure itself and were destroying the gorgeous hall.

Soon the entire structure became a burning mass. Sparks were flying in all directions. The hot breath of the flame made longer stay impossible. A sheet of fire, leaping outward, spread to other parts of the palace, and the magnificent home of the Royal incendiary became a seething caldron of fire and smoke.

Suddenly the voice of the Queen roused her subjects, with the imperious command: "Now follow me, ye faithful, to finish the work ordained by the gods." She then rushed madly from the hall.

Cornelius had been a silent, shocked witness of the cruel devastation. He sought not to interfere in the carrying out of Cahina's plans, knowing it would be as impossible to stop her in her course as to stay the flames her torch had started. The miraculous transformation of this queen into a fiend, dazed him. He detained her for a moment, as they passed through the gates,

prompted to do so by an inspiration that seemed to pierce the confusion of his mind. In a whisper he begged permission to remove from the treasury the moneys deposited there for the purpose of paying the soldiers,—one of the great needs of the early future.

Cahina turned to him with eyes feverish and sparkling with the glow of wild enthusiasm, and looked at him as if unable to grasp the full import of his request. Seemingly dismissing the subject from her mind, she gently replied, in strange contrast with her mood: "Whatever the chosen of my heart desires, must be for my welfare; therefore, do as thou wilt." Then she left him quickly, and disappeared among her excited subjects.

In the distance, far down the valley, could be seen the houses of the Berber farmers, made beautiful and clear by this costly illumination. The walls encircling the city seemed turned to gold by the witchery of the flames. The dark, narrow streets were all brightened and transformed by the wondrous light. The river, flowing far below, on three sides of the city, reflecting the conflagration, became a great water-mirror filled with thousands of mad, dancing, twisting serpents of fire.

Cornelius caught the whole scene as he rushed along to find Rezin, now Captain of the Sacred Band, to assist him in his work. He found him quickly, and together they went to Cahina's apartment. Though a thick smoke rolled and became more suffocating each moment, there they found her two faithful Nubian slaves standing bravely at their post of duty by her door. The four men entered the room, and procured many precious stones and jewels of great value. These they placed

in a large vase. Then, with great difficulty and danger, they at last succeeded in secreting it in one of the stone grottoes in the gardens of the palace. They next forced their way into the treasury, and, with the aid of other slaves, transferred all the strong boxes filled with coin to the same place in the garden.

The burning of the palace attracted all the inhabitants of the city, many of whom attempted to extinguish the fire, until Cahina, declaring it was the will of the gods that the palace and the city should be destroyed, forbade every effort to quench the flame. She sent her crier to proclaim to the people the mandate communicated to her from the spirit-world.

This he did, in the very words the Queen used in making the revelation to her guests at the banquet.

The rabble, having nothing to lose, received the proclamation with favor. It was to them a rare excitement, an excellent diversion. The rich were thrown into wild consternation; they saw with horror and dismay unspeakable this certain destruction of their property. The wealth that gave the cities of Cahina's realm their grandeur and luxury was held in the hands of aliens: Jews, Mahommedans, and Christians—for the Berbers it had no attraction; they cared for naught but their flocks and grazing grounds. To the high-priest and his followers the Queen repeated the spirit-message; it was her intention, she told him, to fulfil it rigorously.

"Thy slave," he replied meekly, bowing low, "must obey gladly the will of the mistress who controls his life and fortune."

The sentiment of servile submission to the will and every caprice of the Prophetess-Queen, as expressed by

the high-priest, prevailed among all classes throughout the kingdom. Her power over them was such that no one murmured at this blighting edict. Even Askalon, consecrated as ever to his own interest, was silent and did not disapprove: he saw in the dire calamity an opportunity to create, later, such animus against Cornelius that the Commander of the army would be obliged to depart forever. Not a subject raised his voice against the cruel command that drove his wife and little ones from their homes, and cruelly destroyed their means of support.

Cahina lacked not for aid to carry out her bidding. The high-priest, anxious to gain favor, begged that the execution of the commands of the gods be entrusted to him, as the chief disciple of the deities. This proposition found favor with Her Majesty, and she gave him command of the army that was to carry out this fearful destruction. He gathered round him the priests, many of the returned soldiers, and those of the rabble most persistent in offering their services. Forthwith they started to devastate the magnificent city of Constantine, its temples and palaces, its amphitheaters, and its pompous dwellings; and to render homeless its confiding, loyal, and helpless inhabitants.

The priestly band marched in advance, chanting weird dirges, accompanied by the clashing of cymbals, the shrill notes of flutes, and the hoarse blare of trumpets. They were followed by a small army of half-drunken soldiers and a riotous rabble, composed of the outcasts, thieves, and vagabonds from the slums of the city, incited to pillage and destruction by the viragoes of ferocious mien, who went about by night in that quarter of the

city, and were secluded by day; they now came forth in the daylight like lean snakes after prey; they formed a cursing, shrill-voiced, hideous fringe to the destroying army, and gloated over the awful work.

The priests marched first to that part of the city where were situated the palaces of the high-born and the stately houses of worship of all sects. Through them they rushed, driving the occupants before them. They ripped, tore, and smashed everything within reach, then applied the torch. From these they proceeded to the more modest dwellings of the merchants, and soon these also were pillaged and in flames.

The destroyers next turned their attention to the huts of the lowly. Thousands of eager hands soon razed them to the ground. In this section of the city the homes were composed wholly of wooden structures, through which the fire spread with such great speed that all avenues of escape were cut off. Here were caught and destroyed the infant, the aged, the sick and decrepit, and those who, from various causes, were unable to flee rapidly to places of safety. All fell victims to the flames.

The vandals were not satisfied with destroying the city itself; the lust for destruction caused them to attack the formidable walls surrounding it. These were razed to the ground by a host of men, armed with sledges and weapons of all kinds, and using every means known to military science. All that was saved in this great disaster were the belongings of a few merchants, who did not wholly lose their presence of mind, but rushed to their bazars and quickly gathered up whatever valuables they could, and fled with their families from the

doomed city—many hiding their treasures carefully in secret places in the mountains.

The awful work was not accomplished at once. For five days and nights it went on unceasingly and thoroughly; and when it was finished—Constantine was but a memory; a site, not a city! This magnificent capital, surpassed only by Carthage, and celebrated for its splendor and wealth, its noble structures, its beautiful thoroughfares, vast commerce, peerless monuments, and other works of art, no less than for its impregnable fortifications, was entirely destroyed. Nothing remained but crumbling ruins, and heaps of blackened stones and ashes. All landmarks of its ancient glories were wiped away. Not even an outline of its thoroughfares remained. Only a region of ruins and débris was left to mark this once-splendid capital of the Orient.

*Chapter Twelve.*

## In the Ashes of an Empire.

WHEN the palace was destroyed, a tent had been erected in front of the blackened portal. Within its shelter had been improvised a rude throne, made out of blocks of smoked and defaced marble, taken from the débris. For three days and nights the Queen had sat there almost continuously, scarcely tasting food or drink, with inflexible gravity of demeanor and motionless as one of the bronze idols that the people worshiped. A wild glitter was in her eyes, and at times, as she followed the work of burning and despoiling her majestic city, a grim smile of satisfaction played round her lips. At frequent intervals, emissaries brought reports of the progress of the destruction. These she received and dismissed in grave silence.

But she showed greater interest when the high-priest reported in person that the destruction of Constantine was complete. She ordered him to march with his army against all the fortified towns in the kingdom, to dismantle the walls, and to destroy them one after another as completely as he had destroyed the capital.

Soon the towns along the coast were converted into a blackened trail of ruins. The blighting hand of the destroyers then blasted the fertile plains and valleys. Groves of fruit trees and palms were hewn down;

vineyards were stripped of their fruit; miles and miles of olive and orange groves were uprooted, thousands of beautiful suburban villas were fed to the flames, and the granaries of the farmers, filled with food for a Nation, were wantonly sacrificed to the fury of the destroying army. Not a town, not a village, not a hamlet from Tripoli to Tangris escaped the torch or the ax. The whole coast, from the frontier of Egypt to the ocean, was changed from a populous, rich, and fertile region to a wild, barren, and desolate waste.

Cahina maintained her position and attitude until the work in Constantine was done. Cornelius stationed a heavy guard around her tent, fearing that she might be attacked. Especially was this imminent on the third night, when the highest pitch of excitement was reached by the frenzied mobs.

In its fully-aroused lust for incendiarism and plunder, the crazed rabble whirled past the rude throne, unmindful of the presence of their Sovereign. She uttered no word of complaint or of approbation, but regarded them stoically and motionless as the fragments of marble at her feet, the wild light gleaming in her eyes being the only indication that life existed in her statuesque form.

On the fifth night, she observed Cornelius standing beside the marble block whereon her feet rested.

"Tell me, Greek," she cried out, in a harsh and unnatural manner, "will future generations compare me with the mad emperor Nero, and say that I, like him, for mine own insane amusement, gave my beautiful capital to the flames? No," she continued, in answer to her own question, "I am not mad, I do not imitate the

monster Nero. Listen, soldier! the world must know the truth. You must establish the fact, that, in obedience to the command of the gods, and in order to prevent my land and its treasures from falling into the hands of the Moslem robbers, and thus to save my subjects from enforced proselytism to the hated Mohammedan religion, I ordered its destruction. Oh, woe to me! woe the hour when I became the medium for the dissemination of this calamitous decree."

Repeating this last phrase over and over again, she lashed herself into a frenzy of excitement, until her eyes protruded from their sockets; her lips were flecked with large drops of froth, and her body swayed to and fro like a tree in a tempest.

Cornelius implored her to compose herself, and earnestly assured her that future generations would render her full justice, and attribute the destruction of the land to a noble impulse of self-sacrifice, prompted by the Queen's great love for her subjects. But his arguments and entreaties fell on deaf ears.

As a last resort, he appealed to the force of love. In authoritative tones he reminded her of their plighted troth, and, asserting the rights vested in him as her affianced, commanded her to cease repining, and to descend from the makeshift throne. She looked at him with bewildered gaze, the fire in her eyes died out for a moment, and her features assumed a milder aspect.

"Yes," she replied, in softer accents, "it is true thou art my betrothed, and thy word is my law."

She leaped to her feet, but suddenly she became more wild than before.

"Cornelius," she shrieked, "thou wouldst not be

yoked to a degraded woman, who will be loathed and scorned by every man, woman, and child in the land, for cruelly driving them from their homes to die on the highways—one who will always be known as a cruel sorceress? No! for thy sake, Cornelius, our compact must end."

His heart was rent with extreme pity for her keen suffering, her poignant grief, and remorse. On the impulse of the moment he burst out: "Oh! Cahina, in the name of the great love I bear thee, blast not my bright dreams of bliss and all my hopes and pride in being recognized as thy consort, by endangering thy precious life through this terrible despair."

This appeal touched a sympathetic chord in her despairing breast. Slowly she descended from the throne of blackened marble, and, with outstretched arms and lovelighted eyes, she tottered toward him. Weakened by grief and lack of food, she would have fallen from the lower block of stone to the ground, had he not caught her in his arms. She pillowed her head upon his breast, and her pent-up feelings of sorrow and remorse found vent in a piteous fit of weeping. Gently he stroked her hair, trying to console her, as if she were an erring child. In soothing tones he pointed out to her that her strong will would soon repair the mischief done, and restore her kingdom to its former splendor. This seemed to quiet her. She raised her tear-stained eyes to him.

"Cornelius," she said, "thou art the guiding star of my gloomy life. All have fled from me as from a pestilence. Thou art the only friend left me—the only link that now binds me to life. Hadst thou, like my

sycophant courtiers, abandoned me, when shorn of pomp and diadem, I should, on that rude mockery of a throne, have defiantly breathed out my existence as a Queen. The cold marble would have made a fitting sepulcher for the Royal sorceress, whereon an outraged Nation could inscribe my epitaph—'here lies a Queen whose black art converted populous cities into ashes, and smiling fields into a wilderness.' 'Tis true, my will is unconquerable, but alas! my body is not strong as my will. I fear I shall die soon. Even now my brain feels as if the crushing weight of a mountain rested upon it, and my tongue is parched with the fierce heat of the desert."

Cornelius released her. For a moment she stood irresolute, then swayed slightly. He noted with alarm the glare of frenzy returning to her eyes, and he was about to advance toward her, when she raised her head, seemed to draw herself together, and said quickly, as if she feared her strength would fail: "If anything unforeseen should happen to me, I appoint thee and the high-priest regents during—"

Before she could finish the sentence she fell inanimate on the ground before him.

Filled with apprehension, Cornelius dropped to his knees beside her, placed his hand over her heart, and found it still beating. In gratitude to the Almighty he offered up a short prayer; and while his eyes were turned toward heaven, he was amazed to hear words uttered. Watching the face of the unconscious Queen, he discovered these were mutterings from the motionless lips. He placed an ear to them, and, with astonishment, heard her solemnly repeat, in faint tones, the

message of her guardian spirit, precisely as she had delivered it at the banquet table.

When she had finished he placed a hand upon her brow. It was hot, as with fever, while her hands were cold and dry. In a few moments her eyes opened and she stared wildly; she did not know him; she was seized with a delirium and raved unceasingly.

Cornelius sought for some one to help him. In vain he strained his eyes over the sea of blackened ruins; all was now silent and gloomy as death itself. Not a living thing but themselves was within the sound of his voice. Swiftly he ran to the well in a deserted garden near by, and filled his helmet with water; he returned to the spot where Cahina lay. He rested her head upon his lap, and bathed her face with the cooling water, occasionally pouring some into her parched mouth. But it was of no avail—the fever did not abate, and she continued to rave. With great grief he realized that her mind had lost its balance under the awful strain to which she had been subjected.

In despair he walked about the ruins, seeking human aid. He passed a place where the bodies of those who had fallen victims of the fire had bred pestilence, and had driven the few remaining inhabitants from the city. He wandered to the outskirts. To his great joy, he there met Rezin at the head of the Queen's body-guard, which had accompanied the priests and the destroyers a part of the way on their march to the coast. Cornelius stopped them, quickly explained the situation, and together they hastened back to the tent, where they made the Queen as easy and comfortable as possible. Rezin set out to obtain medical aid, and to find some

of the female attendants of the Queen. Two of them he discovered wandering aimlessly among the ruins, and he fortunately found a priest near the temple. The priest had some knowledge of medicine, but he believed more in magic and exorcism.

For many days Cahina tossed on the rude couch, consumed with a burning fever. She raved continually, especially at night when the moon shone brightest. Most frequently her ravings were of her childhood days, and in tones of anguish she would cry out: "Do not take the child away from its dying mother, ye cruel priests." The current of her ravings would then change to battles and scenes of bloodshed her warlike mother had fought and beheld. In her delirium she reviewed all the principal episodes of her life.

Her robust health was more the means of vanquishing the dread disease, than the remedies employed. She held out against it; and as the fever began to abate, her ravings became less wild and incoherent; they assumed a more sentimental strain. Often she referred to her deep and fervent love for Cornelius, and the happy hours they had spent together. On rare occasions her mind wandered to the paths of her unhappy marriage, and she referred to her husband in terms of loathing. Sometimes her mother-love asserted itself, and she demanded that they must not keep her away from her babe, her dear son; she wanted to hold him to her breast, to have his little arms around her neck, and to cover him with kisses. But gradually her mental wanderings became less frequent, and finally they ceased.

One sultry night Cornelius threw aside the folds of the tent to admit the air. He was seated on a cushion

beside her couch. Her women were busy preparing cold applications for her head. Through the opening of the tent the full moon shed a broad beam of silvery light, partly dispelling the gloom within. Cornelius gazed long and dreamily upon her emaciated but still noble countenance; ruminating over the strange bond that united him to this mysterious being, his probable destiny in the event of her recovery, and the utter loneliness that would encompass him in this strange land should she fail to recover—when he was startled to hear his name whispered faintly.

He looked at the Queen. Her eyes were wide open, and a faint smile hovered round her thin lips. He saw them move, and he bent forward quickly, to catch the words, uttered ever so faintly: "Cornelius, my beloved, where am I, and why am I here?"

In soothing tones he told her she had been extremely ill, that she was still weak, and that she must remain quiet, and not exert herself by speaking;—when she would be stronger and able to listen, she would hear all that had occurred since the beginning of her illness. With the relentless persistency of sick people, she insisted on an answer, until Cornelius was, at last, compelled to give her a narcotic draught, which caused her to fall into a profound sleep. Then Cornelius uttered a prayer of grateful thanksgiving at her deliverance from the wasting fever, and went away to get a much-needed rest.

Cahina slept nearly a day and a night. When she awoke, the fever was gone. Although greatly emaciated, her eyes were bright, and her voice was clear. She talked rationally concerning the affairs of the kingdom

and of the battle with the Mohammedans. Strange as it seemed to those grouped about her at the time, she imagined that the tent in which she was lying was the one in the desert to which she was carried when wounded. What startled those who heard her words, was to learn that her mind was a total blank regarding the banquet, as well as her command for the destruction of the rich city and fertile fields of her kingdom.

In trying to account for the void existing in her memory, Cornelius concluded that the inspiration for inciting her people to destroy the city had spent itself simultaneously with the extinction of the flame, when the work of destruction was complete; and that when she beheld, in all its horrors, the frightful consequences of her edict, her mind received a terrible shock.

Nothing was said to the Queen of what had occurred until she had regained her strength. Then to Cornelius fell the disagreeable task of re-awakening her mind to the enactment of the sad scenes of ruin, suffering, and desolation. Several times, when he sat beside her couch and held her transparent hands in his, he was about to broach the subject; but she gazed into his eyes with such an expression of love and confidence, that he could not bring himself to cause her unhappiness.

"Oh, beloved Cornelius, my beloved Cornelius," she said to him frequently in pleading tones, "why dost thou not have me removed from this dreary desert to my palace, where I would soon recover strength, and where, the gods willing, we can prepare for the celebration of our wedding?"

All he could do was to promise that she would soon be moved to the palace.

Cornelius was compelled, ere long, to let her know the truth. A priest, who had traveled from Egypt, carried with him the rumor that Emir Hassan was preparing for another invasion, and it therefore became necessary for Cornelius to rouse Cahina from her lethargy, and frankly to reveal to her the truth, that she might again inspire her people to meet the foe.

He chose to do this on a balmy night when they were alone, and when she was in an unusually cheerful frame of mind and a loving mood, occasioned by their discussion of the details of a proposed pageant that was to be part of the wedding ceremonies. No better opportunity, he deemed, could be had.

"Cahina," he said, when there was a lull in their conversation, "I know thou art convinced of my devotion and sincerity; therefore it is my sacred duty to make thee familiar with certain things that will doubtless shock thee, and that thou wilt find difficult to believe. Thou hast been very ill, and hast been lying in this tent for many weeks. Thou art not now in the desert, where the battle was fought, but in Constantine."

With this introduction, and without reserve, he told her, as briefly as possible, of the incidents of the banquet, and of the subsequent destruction, by her command, of her capital and of other parts of the realm.

As he neared the end of his narrative he could continue only by a great effort; for never before had he beheld such horror expressed on human features as was depicted in the face of Cahina. First, the veins about her temples stood out like heavy cords, then her face became bloodless, and, with her eyes upturned, and her body plainly suffering tortures, she lay for some

moments on the couch quite still, silent as death itself. Once he thought she was dead, and as he leaned over her, she sat bolt upright, and seizing one of his arms, cried hoarsely: "Impossible! I say it is impossible! Give me the proofs."

But she waited not for an answer. She sprang from the couch and staggered toward the opening of the tent. Cornelius leaped to her side, in time to save her from sinking to the ground; for she was still weak. He pleaded with her to return to her couch. She fell to moaning, and implored him to permit her to see the proofs with her own eyes. He deemed it judicious to comply; and, placing an arm firmly round her waist, he led her slowly out of the tent, to an eminence fronting what was left of the palace-wall; from it could be had an extended view of the destroyed city and its environments. The moon was hidden as they stepped out, and a deep shadow rested like a sable pall over the blighted area. The harrowing snarl of ravenous jackals sounded at intervals.

Like mourners they stood in silence, until the moon emerged from a dark cloud that had obscured it; then the soft shimmer of silver light disclosed to Cahina's sight all the horrors of the scene.

When she gazed about, and realized that before her was only the bleak and blackened site of her extinct capital, her agony was heart-rending. She beat her breast, and tore her hair.

"'Tis a base lie," she shrieked, in piercing tones,—"no act of mine has blasted thus my beloved Constantine. Ha! It was the Arab fiends; they returned during my sickness, and brutally blotted out this earthly



THE QUEEN'S AGONY OF REMORSE IN SURVEYING THE RUINS OF AN EMPIRE.

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Paradise, in vengeance for their shameful defeat. The Arabs! the Arabs!" she cried.

Raising her hands aloft, she continued: "May Moloch send down his torrent of fire, and lay their cities and villages in ashes, even as they have done unto Constantine; may they and their wives and children perish in their own homes, in the midst of consuming flames; may they not die until they have suffered ten-fold the agonies that they have inflicted upon my loyal and loving subjects; may the malediction of our gods rest upon their bloodthirsty religion, which commands them to rob, burn, and slay, and—"

The rest of the malediction died away in a hoarse whisper. The violence of her rage had spent its force; she sagged limply on the arm of Cornelius, and continued to stare at the ruins, the awful monuments of her fatal command on the night of the feast.

To divert her attention from the terrible spectacle, and her mind from the horrors of the situation, Cornelius gently led her back to the tent, and sought to rouse her ambition.

"Great Queen," he said, with warmth, "all is not lost. From the flames I have plucked all thy priceless jewels and all the gold and silver coin in the treasury. With this wealth and thy strong will thou canst soon restore thy kingdom to its former glory."

"Alas!" she answered, in faint and sad tones. "Jewels will not restore to life my unfortunate subjects who were destroyed in the flames." She relapsed into gloomy silence, and stared steadily at the ruins, through the opening of the tent.

For a time Cornelius waited.

And as she did not answer, he appealed to her pride and martial ardor. He then adopted another course.

"Thy people," he said, in cold, hard tones, "greatly need thy aid, and look to thee alone for protection in the hour of peril; already do they tremble; for the foe is again about to invade thy domain."

Cornelius had hoped that this appeal would prove effective, and he was partly right in his hope; for her eyes flashed with the old fire; but the next instant she had lapsed into gloomy despair.

"Nay," she responded faintly. "The savages are welcome to my ravaged and depopulated territory, with its smoking ruins and charred corpses, all now more barren than their own desert-wastes."

This answer caused Cornelius to lose heart; and a long, dismal silence followed. He dreaded lest her reason would again give way. His heart overflowed with sympathy at her grief and despair.

As a loving father might treat a child that was ill, he seated himself beside her, drew her head gently to his breast, and again tried, through words of love, to bring life and strength to her shattered nerves, and peace to her tortured heart. In the same strain that he previously employed, he implored, in the name of his great love for her and for the sake of the glory and happiness that awaited him as her husband, that she rouse herself from her lethargy, and institute measures for the relief of her subjects. He begged her, for his sake, to prove to him her love; to forget herself, and to remember her subjects; to put from her mind her horror of the present, and her useless regret for the past, and to reconstruct a new present on the ashes of that past; for she

and he together would rebuild Constantine and her kingdom, that it would rise like a phœnix from the ashes.

Before he had finished his entreaty, she sprang to her feet, pressed her hands against her brow, and regarded him with an expression of bewilderment.

"It seems to me, Cornelius," said she haltingly, "that I have heard these words before. They ring through my mind like an echo. Where was it?"

The inspiration came to Cornelius that if he could but supply to her mind one link in the chain of lost events, by the marvellous working of memory it might awaken to consciousness all the others, and perhaps the details of that whole awful week would become luminant and clear.

"Noble Queen," he began, "listen to this, my last supplication, and strive to remember whether the pleading words are familiar to thine ears. Oh, Cahina, in the name of the great love I bear thee, blast not my bright dreams of bliss, and all my hopes and pride in being recognized as thy consort, by endangering thy precious life through this terrible despair."

"Yes yes, Cornelius," she exclaimed eagerly. "Recently, in a dream, I heard those words. I dreamed I was sitting on a throne made of marble blocks, when you uttered such words to me, while looking at—" Without finishing the sentence, she violently pressed her hands against her forehead, and, as if her mind had been reawakened, she turned to him with eyes wide open with horror: "I did commit this foul crime against my country and my people. Oh, ye gods, ye gods!" And she sank down again, quivering with remorse and

agony. But in a moment she again confronted him. "I will not survive the destruction of my country. I beseech thee, Cornelius, if thou lovest me, pierce my heart with thy sword, and end my misery now." And with the words she frantically tore open her robe and bared her bosom. Cornelius drew back, horrified at her mad request.

She turned upon him fiercely: "If thou art too cowardly to grant my last favor, then Cahina shall drive the blade into the heart of the monster Queen who destroyed her loving subjects!"

Ere Cornelius could realize the import of her threat, she had grasped the hilt of his sword and partly drawn it from the scabbard. Before she was able to release it entirely, he clutched the bright steel with both hands; and, as she tugged, the keen blade cut into the bone, and the blood gushed forth and trickled from the end of the scabbard. He uttered no sound until she rested for a moment.

"Hold!" he cried, "before thou shalt be able to commit this rash act, thou must sever my hand."

These words drew her attention to his serious injury; and when she saw his blood coursing over the steel and running from the scabbard, she made no further effort to extricate the weapon, but gently released it. He restored it to its former position, and hastily bandaged his wounds; then, turning to Cahina, he entreated her to listen to the prompting of reason and duty.

"Thou wert guilty of no deception, and committed no crime," he said. "Thy prophecy is verified; for the Arabs have ere now started on their march for a second invasion of the country; but when they behold its

blackened ruins, their desire for strife and plunder will cease to exist. When these land-pirates find no cities to pillage, no inhabitants to convert to their fanatical creed at the point of the sword, they will return to their desert-haunts. Therefore calm thyself, and abandon all thought of self-destruction."

She was bewildered, and unable to determine instantly how to act. Her roving eyes noted that the blood from the wound she had inflicted on Cornelius was penetrating the cloths with which he had bound them; her head dropped forward, and she shook with sobbing:

"Oh, my beloved country! Thy glory has departed. Where is now the pride and power of the Prophetess-Queen? Woe is me; for I changed my beautiful country into a desert-waste, I scattered its peoples, and I destroyed them and their homes with fire."

She lamented thus for some time, and seemed to derive comfort and consolation from her tears. Then she told Cornelius she felt more composed and could endure to hear all the details of the affliction; she requested him to tell her, without any reservation, what had become of her people.

"Those who managed to save anything," he replied, "fled with their possessions from the blighted city, but others not so fortunate lost all their worldly goods. Many died of exposure, disease, and starvation. Numbers fled to the hills, where they are now sharing the poverty of the mountaineers in mud hovels. Your mountain-tribes fared best in these scenes of destruction; for they had nothing to lose in the general devastation of the country. They merely returned to their mountain fastnesses, to follow their usual course of

plundering each other and hunting wild animals. The poor husbandmen have suffered most severely, and can scarcely eke out an existence on the fruits and grains that escaped destruction.

"And what of the priests?" inquired Cahina, with growing interest.

"Even when the fire had spent its force, and its desolation meant death to the people," Cornelius replied, with hardly repressed sarcasm, "Constantine still held attractions for the priests. Even now they are comfortably housed in the vaults beneath the ruined temple, which escaped injury,—vaults filled with all the luxuries of life. At the point of the sword, I compelled the priests to surrender from this store food to supply thy body-guard. Those of the citizens that returned to search among the ruins for lost valuables, were compelled to pay exorbitant prices for scant supplies of food, and they soon left again. Only the priests and the jackals could live in Constantine."

Cahina listened to this recital of woe in sad silence, but with a flush of anger at the heartlessness of the priests. She seemed to be debating with herself as she listened. When Cornelius ceased to speak, she inquired, with the ring of former energy in her tones, if it were really true that Hassan and his army were about to invade the country.

Assured that it was, she mused in silence for several moments, and, much to the joy of Cornelius, she said tranquilly: "The revelation of my good spirit, that a second invasion by the Arabs will take place, has been truly verified. It remains not for me to reproach or criticise the deities of the invisible world; yet it will

soon be determined if their command, to devastate the country, can deter this robber horde from attempts at further conquest. Whether it deters or not, my duty is to meet the invader, and to annihilate his army."

This determination seemed to bring with it her old fire and vigor of mind; for she immediately commanded Cornelius to despatch trusted emissaries to the Amgar and the chiefs of the other tribes, with orders to report at once to the Queen at Constantine. Still revolving in her mind the details of this new project, she inquired of Cornelius what part of the contents of the treasury had been saved. When he told her that all the treasure was safe, and also her chest of jewels, she embraced him repeatedly.

"How can I thank and reward thee sufficiently for this noble act, Cornelius!" she exclaimed. "The only adequate reward will be to divide my crown with thee. Thy prudence and foresight has relieved me from great embarrassment. My way is now clear to rescue my subjects from further misery and hardships, and to form another army to confront the Moslem hosts."

She ceased, and for some time was absorbed in profound meditation. Suddenly she inquired if there was a ship in the neighboring port.

Cornelius told her that one had arrived several days before, which had been seized and forcibly detained by him.

"'Tis well," she replied. "Give Rezin all my jewels, and despatch him forthwith to the emperor Leontius, at Constantinople, bearing from me a message apprising him of the second Mohammedan invasion, and praying him to send to me, one of his mercenary

legions, as an ally against the Arabian fanatics. In consideration therefor, offer to him the crown-jewels and moneys in addition, if required. When this order shall have been carried out, cause a proclamation to be made, that all merchants and artisans of Constantine and other cities shall return immediately; that food and temporary homes will be supplied to them and to their families; that when the Arabs shall finally be expelled from the land, ample means will be furnished the people to restore their homes and bazars to the conditions existing before the fire. That this proclamation may reach the people quickly, send it broadcast by detachments from the body-guard."

Cahina, now aglow with re-awakened energy, and eager to make reparation to her subjects, still had time to manifest her gratitude for the services rendered her by Cornelius. As he was about to leave her, to carry out her instructions, she placed her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Cornelius," she said, her voice trembling with emotion, "I love thee more than crown or kingdom, yea, even more than life itself. Thou art truly a precious gift sent to me by the gods to cast joy and sunshine over my gloomy path. Thou hast watched over me like a guardian angel. But for thine unselfish devotion I should have been a prey to madness; but for thy bleeding hands and pleading voice, my suicidal soul would now be in the toils of darkness. Thy wisdom will be the means of restoring my shattered kingdom, and, since thou hast preserved it, and also saved my reason and my life, why should I not worship thee as my master, my king, my god of light and love? As

thy slave, and not thy Queen, I lay at thy feet my heart, my crown, and all else that I possess in this world."

Then she kissed him many times, until, suddenly, as if ashamed for having thus revealed her heart to him, her cheeks became aflame, she abruptly disengaged herself from his embrace, and casting herself upon the couch, fell to weeping violently.

Cornelius stole quickly from the tent, and attended to all her separate commands. Each, in due season, accomplished the purpose desired by the Queen.

Again she was at the head of a populated capital, which, though still denuded of its stately palaces, temples, and elegant residences, gave comfort and shelter to the inhabitants, who were plentifully provided with the necessaries of life. More important still, Cornelius was again in command of a large army.

*Chapter Thirteen.*

# The Breaking of the Spell.

THE prophecy uttered by Cahina at the banquet was fulfilled: the Moslems returned, with double the force they had first marched against her capital. On this occasion they were not surprised, but were drawn up in battle-array, at a short distance from Constantine, when Cahina's army marched out to meet them. But it was not the same army that had so gallantly repelled the Moslems and had, but a short time ago, slaughtered them on this same sandy plain.

Not only was her army inferior in numbers, but it was dispirited as well. Neither her personal magnetism nor her fame as a prophetess was now sufficient to arouse in her forces the fearless spirit of patriotism that had inspired them during the previous war with the Arabs. The mountain-tribes alone were enthusiastic; but these formed only a small portion of the army. The tradesmen of the cities, and the husbandmen of the plain, whose property had been wasted by the fatal zeal of the Queen, could not forgive her for their sorrow and poverty. They were in a rebellious mood, and were half-inclined to hail the Moslem invaders, not as despoilers of their country, but as its saviours. The

mercenary hirelings from Constantinople were drawn up at a distance of several miles from the main body, where they clamored for their pay, vowing they would not move an inch until their demands were satisfied. Cornelius, knowing full well what all this meant, exercised all his ingenuity to meet the situation, but without avail.

On the eve of the battle the Queen summoned the chiefs of all the tribes, the generals, the principal courtiers, and tradesmen to partake of a feast in a spacious tent that had been pitched beside her own. The preceding banquet had been held in the gorgeous hall of the brilliantly illuminated palace, where the guests reposed on luxurious couches, beside tables laden with delicate and costly viands and the richest of wines, amid the sounds of soft strains of music and mirth and revelry. The present feast had the same guests, but they were now gathered in a tent, dimly lighted by a few oil lamps; they squatted on mats, and spread upon the ground before them were such coarse fare and rough wines as could be procured in a devastated land. Here Cahina planned to make a last demonstration of her magical powers. She determined, further, to make an eloquent appeal to her followers, to rouse their drooping spirits to the height of their former enthusiasm and confidence in her as their leader.

She swept into the tent with the same majestic carriage as of old, and gracefully assumed a position upon a low ottoman at the upper end of the tent. Her appearance created a momentary gleam of light and brightness in the gloomy tent, and among its cheerless inmates. Though her glory had departed, a flash of

the old enthusiasm swept over them, and they welcomed her with shouts of joy. But when they returned to the plain viands and the insipid wines, their spirits, temporarily galvanized into enthusiasm, sank lower than before, and there was nothing of good cheer, mirth, or hilarity. The contrast of this frugal feast with the magnificent banquets of Constantine in the days of its splendor, was the contrast of death with life.

Under the direction of Hormusjee, the lower basin of the fountain that Cahina had caused to spout forth the blood-red fire, was placed near the cushion occupied by the Queen. When the silence became oppressive, she held a whispered conversation with the aged Hormusjee. He retired from the tent. In a moment he returned, bearing a lighted torch.

Cahina arose, and, with all the solemnity that marked her on previous occasions of a similar character, she fixed her gaze upon the assemblage, and said in a low and solemn voice: "Hearken to the command of the gods through the voice of my guiding genii, whose invisible spirit will now commune with me through the holy fire of our worship."

She seized the torch from the hand of Hormusjee, and, with a semblance of her old-time energy, she held it over the basin, that its light might be reflected from the surface of the fluid therein.

These preliminaries had the desired effect; for the superstitious ardor of those present was aroused to the highest pitch. Though they dreaded again to behold the terrible manifestation of the power of their gods through fire and blood, yet they longed to witness the awful spectacle, that it might prove to them that the

gods had not deserted their Queen, and had not shorn her of all mystic power. So, with breathless interest, they awaited the result of the miracle of fire about to be enacted, upon which depended, they felt, the issue of the morrow's battle.

Cahina intuitively divined what was passing in their minds, and, without delay, she thrust the burning torch into the liquid. Instantly a hissing sound was heard, and, to the mingled consternation and delight of the awe-inspired fire-worshipers, a thin column of flame shot high into the air; but to their great alarm and amazement, it receded to the basin as quickly as it had leaped upward. Then, with superstitious anxiety, the Queen's pagan followers waited to see the pillar of holy fire grow in volume and ascend heavenward. But alas! it rose not again. In its stead, a blazing ball of flame undulated upon the surface of the water.

A murmur of chagrin ran through the deeply disappointed throng. They whispered to each other that the gods had withdrawn their celestial favoritism from the Queen; she was now divested of miraculous power.

As for Cahina, though astonished at the failure of the fiery pillar to rise aloft, she retained her calmness of demeanor and acted as if nothing unusual had happened; she stood erect in lofty dignity, undaunted, and gazing fearlessly at the disillusioned throng.

"The gods are in wrath," she said, in firm tones. "Nought is hidden from their penetrating eyes. They have read your discontented and rebellious spirit, and to impious eyes they refuse to display the stupendous miracle of the sacred fountain."

She bowed her head reverently over the basin, where

a thread of the flame struggled feebly, and seemed about to puff out. But her explanation of the failure did not satisfy her hearers.

Cahina felt that the spell was broken, that her credulous and enthusiastic followers were disenchanted; they no longer believed that their Sorceress-Queen possessed magical power. Yet even in defeat she defied them.

"Men of Mauritania," she announced, her voice ringing with proud disdain, "again the vision has appeared to me, and commands ye to remain steadfast in the religion of thy forefathers and in the defense of thy country. The god of war will march before thy column, and with his breath of fire shall again annihilate the enemy. Return to thy tents with courage renewed. Dream of the glorious victory that awaits my invincible army with the rising of to-morrow's sun."

Uttering no word of approval or dissent, they left the presence of their once-idolized Queen. They moved slowly to their quarters.

That night word was brought in by the scouts that the vanguard of Hassan's army was in sight, and that a battle might be expected the following day.

At daybreak Hassan roused his army, and, after prayer and ablution, he led them within easy distance of the blackened walls of Constantine.

"Allah is with us," he cried, in loud and piercing tones, "and he will bless our arms with victory!"

Soon afterward, the first division of Cahina's army, composed of mountain-tribesmen, under the command of Cornelius, and headed by the Amgar, sallied forth to meet the Arabs. At sight of the Moslems the army halted, waiting to be joined by the troops of mercenaries

that were encamped on the plains five miles west of the city. The Mohammedans were prepared, and were only awaiting the attack of Cahina's forces; but her reinforcements not having arrived, action was delayed. Thus the two armies stood face to face, without any attempt at actual hostilities on either side.

Suddenly Hassan, mounted on a spirited black horse, galloped straight toward the Berber lines, and in stentorian voice defied some champion of the pagan Queen to meet him in single combat. There was silence in the ranks of Cahina's army for a few moments.

"Has the Sorceress-Queen no great champion in her cowardly army to accept my challenge?" Hassan again shouted tauntingly.

This insult aroused Cornelius, who dug his spurs into his horse's flanks and dashed forward to meet the boastful general. But Cahina seized the bridle of his horse, and in agonized tones whispered: "Thou shalt not die for me, my beloved, at the hands of yon fanatic."

Cornelius hastily answered that some one must accept the challenge, to gain time until the mercenaries arrive.

"Let some one else advance," the Queen answered. "Thou art needed for the guidance of the army."

Again the loud voice of the Arab arose in a sneering shout: "For the third and last time I ask, Cannot one brave man be found to accept my challenge? If ye refuse, I do brand the whole army as cowards."

The words had scarcely been uttered, when a wild shout was heard, and a commotion arose in the Berber ranks. The burly Amgar, fuming with rage to avenge the insult to his Queen, galloped furiously through the serried lines to meet the Moslem challenger.

Hassan was of medium size and spare of frame, but his muscles, from constant exercise, were as hard and tough as steel. With grace and skill he rode his horse.

The Amgar was a complete contrast to Hassan. He was a man of great girth, with much brawn and bone, and bestrode a horse befitting his weight. He was habited in the gaudy costume of the mountain Berbers, save for a Roman helmet he was wearing.

In hushed silence both armies gazed upon the Amgar, his heavy spear poised aloft, forcing his horse with terrific speed upon the Moslem. But Hassan, with graceful dexterity, wheeled his nimble charger just in time to avoid the headlong collision. Then, to the great chagrin of the Amgar and to the universal merriment of the Moslem army, Hassan, with exquisite skill, swiftly rode his steed round a wide circle, thereby depriving the Amgar of the chance of launching his spear at his antagonist.

Finally, the Amgar became so exasperated at the derisive shouts of the Moslems, he could no longer restrain himself; he suddenly hurled his unwieldy spear, with great strength but without his usual skill, at his antagonist. It missed its mark, and, before he had time to draw his sword, Hassan, swift as the eagle, swooped down upon him, and whirled his well-tempered Damascus simitar above the Amgar's head, bringing it down with such irresistible force upon his helmet that it crashed through the head-covering as if it were made of parchment, and cleft the Amgar's skull.

As the Berber chieftain rolled lifeless from his saddle, the Arab host howled with triumphant joy; while the Berber troops groaned and raged to be led

forward to avenge the death of their chieftain. The victor pranced back and forth midway between his admiring followers and his embittered foes. And when the shouts of triumph and derision had subsided, Hassan challenged another champion to combat.

Cahina, with intense anxiety, looked round to see if the reinforcements were advancing.

"Alas!" she whispered to Cornelius, in bitter disappointment. "They come not, something must be done to gain time until these hirelings reach us."

"Oh, Cahina," replied Cornelius, "let me meet the Arab. I stand his equal, both in skill and in strength."

"Nay, Cornelius," she gasped. "Nay, rather defeat than to see you slain before my eyes."

As she spoke two youths spurred to the front; both tall and well-knit. The one that seemed the elder was the heavier and more awkwardly built; while the other, though smaller, was lithe and active. They rode toward Cahina, and, as they approached her, they cried out together: "Oh, great Queen, we are the sons of the Amgar, slain by the Moslem fiend, and a dispute has arisen between us as to who shall avenge our father's death. Therefore, we pray thee, decide between us."

At the sight of these two comely youths, the pride of their race, and the coming solace of their widowed mother, willing to die in her cause, Cahina's heart was touched with grief. Her eyes grew moist.

"Noble youths," she exclaimed, with deep emotion, "thy mother hath given me food and shelter, and I cannot choose which of her sons shall place his life in jeopardy for me."

Then the youngest said bravely: "Oh, great Queen,

at my father's death my brother becomes chief of his tribe, and it is his duty to lead it forth to battle; so he cannot be spared; while I can."

While the youths were still wrangling, the high-priest, accompanied by Askalon, pushed forward. A thrill of hope shot through Cahina's aching heart.

"Are the reinforcements yet at hand?" she cried to the high-priest, in a tone of breathless eagerness.

"They marched as far as the site of your former palace, when their commander despatched Askalon to me with a message declaring that his troops will not stir from the spot until they receive payment of wages two months in advance."

With inexpressible anguish written on every line of her noble countenance, Cahina turned to Cornelius.

"Oh, Cornelius," said she, "help me in this last, awful trial of my fortitude."

He motioned to the high-priest, and, in a whisper, said: "To you alone I entrust the secret of the hiding-place of the last of our treasures. You will find them stored in the third grotto, opening on the right-hand path of the palace garden. Distribute it thyself to the mutinous soldiers." Then, pointing to Askalon, Cornelius sternly continued: "If it be possible, dispense with the services of that man."

To give these directions required but a few seconds, meanwhile the whole Mohammedan army was derisively howling: "Where is the champion of your Sorceress-Queen? Cowards,—dogs of infidels,—you fear to face our great Hassan!"

These insulting taunts roused the elder son of the late Amgar to the highest pitch of rage and excitement.

He parleyed no further, but spurred his horse at a gallop straight upon Hassan, who was in the act of receiving a javelin from an attendant and had his back turned toward the Berber lines. The Arab general, startled by the rush of the horse behind him, wheeled dexterously, to face the uplifted spear in the hands of the enraged Berber. As the weapon was hurled at him, the nimble Moslem flung himself from his horse, and the spear flew harmlessly over his head; and ere the young Amgar could recover himself, Hassan leaped again upon his horse without touching the stirrups, and, with true aim and powerful hand, hurled the javelin at his foe. Skilfully the other interposed his shield of rhinoceros hide, but it availed him naught. The momentum of the flying javelin was so great that it pierced through the shield and transfixed the young soldier's heart.

Again delirious shouts of joy from the Arab columns filled the air. The Berber ranks were hushed with sorrow and dismay. Even Cahina began to lose heart, and her great hopes gave way to an agony of despair. Once more she scanned the horizon to meet the welcome sight of her advancing reinforcements,—but no trace of them was visible.

Ere Islam's champion could issue another challenge, the younger son of the slain Amgar spurred his horse to Cahina's side.

"Say farewell to my mother," he cried in haste; "should I be slain, tell her I died as befitted her son, in defense of my Queen, while avenging the death of my father and brother."

Cornelius hastily forced the youth to take his own bronze shield instead of the one he carried. Thus

equipped, the youth charged forward with undaunted courage against the hitherto invincible conqueror.

Swift as the flight of a hawk he dashed at his antagonist, who was calmly awaiting the onset; he expected by his strength and agility to beat down the fragile youth as he had beaten down the father and the brother. But the young man had profited by their experience, and, in imitation of the example set by his wily antagonist, he directed his steed round a circle as he came within the range of Hassan's mace; he continued to course swiftly in circling evolutions round the Moslem, never presenting a full front to his foe, thus thwarting all aggressive attacks; while he was prepared to seize any advantage. The youth performed these maneuvers—learned while witnessing the combat between Hassan and his father—with such ease that he excited the admiration of even the Moslem host.

Hassan, confounded by the adoption of his own strategy, was obliged quickly to veer his steed to the right and left, in conformity with the evolutions of the Berber, to avoid presenting his body to attack. Thus they continued to skirmish, until both armies became impatient. Each yelled at its respective champion to rush in and deal a finishing stroke. The blood of the combatants was rising to fever-heat by the fierce cries of their followers; each prepared to strike a fatal blow; each guided his steed with his limbs, his left hand holding his shield in position to afford protection, while in his right hand he poised his weapon—the Berber a spear, the Moslem a mace.

The gallant youth directed the spear straight at the head of his adversary; but the keen eye of Hassan

caught its range. He lowered his body, and the spear whizzed over him; and as it passed, he recovered his position, and his mace crashed against the shield, raised by the young man, with such force that he was hurled to the ground. In an instant the Arab was beside him, simitar in hand. Bending from the saddle, he gloated over the fallen youth. He then waved the glistening weapon before the eyes of the Berber.

"Pagan dog," he shouted, in tones loud enough to be heard by many in both armies, "promise to adjure your idolatrous religion and become converted to the true faith, or I will send thy soul to Eblis."

The young man proudly raised his head as he cried defiantly: "I would rather follow my murdered father and brother to the spirit-land than live to join your accursed religion. Do as thou wilt!"

Before another word, Hassan had severed his head from his body. A thrill of horror ran through the Berber army, which stood silent and depressed; while the Moslems, like frenzied demons, yelled with fierce and unrestrained triumph, to the banging of drums and the blaring of trumpets.

Again the hero of the hour pranced back and forth between the armies, and challenged the Sorceress-Queen to send forth still another champion against his strong arm, blessed by Allah and Mahomet his Prophet. Cahina, in hopeless despair, eagerly scanned the barren waste. No sign of the rescuing columns was visible. Her heart almost ceased to beat, and in mute despair she closed her eyes.

"Oh, ye gods!" she moaned, "do not desert me in this hour of peril, nor deliver me up to Islam."

Yet it was necessary that another victim should be flung into the devouring arms of the insatiable Moslem, to exhaust the last chance for the arrival of reinforcements. Who was it to be this time? Cahina's tortured soul had not long to wait.

Rezin—noble, self-sacrificing Rezin—accoutered in Byzantine armor from head to foot, galloped out toward the foe. Cries of delight this time ascended from the Berber ranks, answered only by looks of astonishment and anxiety on the part of the Moslem host, at the sight of a soldier completely mail-clad. But Hassan, with a smile of self-reliance and a wave of his hand, soon reassured his troops.

Cornelius shouted to Rezin as he passed, to prolong the contest as much as possible. Drawing his sword, Rezin boldly attacked Hassan, bearing straight upon him with great speed, and, when within reach of the Moslem, delivering a terrific blow at his head.

Hassan, smiling contemptuously, swerved his horse aside and received the blow upon his shield, and, in turn, swiftly whirled his simitar toward Rezin's neck, who as skilfully parried the lunge with his sword. The Berber champion, inferior in skill, was the equal of his adversary in coolness, strength, and courage.

Rezin forced the strife, and aimed blow after blow at the unprotected body of his enemy, often driving him backward till both were close to the front line of the Moslem army; when Hassan would suddenly wheel his horse round, and deftly try to penetrate through some exposed joint in Rezin's armor. Thus Hassan, in turn, would press Rezin back toward the Berber line, parrying with exquisite skill the Berber's formidable blows.

Rezin's armor, though not new, was strong and impervious to Hassan's attacks.

Thus continued to clash steel against steel, the adversaries thrusting, parrying, and exchanging blows with each other, while advancing and retreating between the hostile lines, neither gaining any substantial advantage. Hassan realized that he had met a foeman worthy of his steel. He was chagrined at being foiled thus long in his expectation of adding another victim to the list of his bloody triumphs. At length, impatiently throwing his simitar upon the ground, he quickly disengaged a mace from his saddle-bow, and, rushing toward Rezin, he dealt him a powerful blow upon the shoulder ere he could ward it off with his buckler. The Moslem host set up a premature shout of joy; but Rezin recovered himself instantly, and, seizing his own mace, aimed a desperate blow at Hassan, who caught it on uplifted shield.

Rezin now attacked his foe with ferocious celerity. Hassan required all his alertness and skill, and all the agility of his horse, to avoid the fatal effect of even a single blow. The great strain both on men and horses was beginning to tell. Hassan showed signs of fatigue, and his horse was perceptibly slackening his pace. He appeared to be losing his presence of mind, he no longer made graceful curves, but, instead, dashed backward and forward between the lines to avoid being struck. Rezin remained in close pursuit, and finally, almost within an arm's length of his adversary's head, he had raised his heavy weapon high in air to strike a fatal blow.

The Berber army gave vent to its pent-up feelings by

a loud and prolonged yell of fierce joy, that rolled through the dismayed ranks of the Moslem host. Alarmed at the imminent peril of their Commander, they were about to sally forth to his rescue. Rezin's horse stepped upon the simitar lying on the ground, where Hassan had cast it, and stumbled on his knees.

Ere Rezin could pull his wounded horse to his feet, the Moslem was upon him like a hungry tiger, and, raising himself in the stirrups, he swung his mace above his turbaned head, and brought it down with terrific force upon the helmet of his antagonist. The blow did not smash the head-piece, but crushed it down on its wearer's head, so that the blood gushed forth from his nostrils. He reeled in the saddle, and, as he seemed about to fall, a cry of horror rang out from the panic-stricken Berbers. But Rezin was only stunned. In his bewildered state he dropped forward and twined his arms round the neck of his faithful steed. The sagacious animal seemed to understand what was required of him, and galloped into the Berber ranks, his unconscious master lying on his neck. Tenderly the bleeding form of Rezin was lifted from the saddle and carried to the rear. Again the Moslem trumpets blared, the war drums rolled, and the Arabs shouted.

The silence of the grave prevailed over the Berber army. Its pride was humbled, and its spirit all but crushed, by the repeated overthrow of its champions. It was cowed and dismayed, and replied not to the mocking jeers of the hated foe.

Although Cahina's inward anguish was almost too great for endurance, yet her lofty spirit was unsubdued. Tremulously she turned in the direction of the

ruined city, hoping to gladden her eyes with the sight of the promised succor; not even a cloud of dust in the far-off horizon, which might denote the approach of troops, met her gaze. Fierce rage, instead of sadness, filled her soul as she called down bitter imprecations upon the head of the perfidious army, that had deserted her in her hour of need.

Consumed by anger, she resumed her position in front of her troops, her heart pierced as with a dagger-thrust as Hassan vauntingly shouted that, If there were no pagan dogs who could fight him, he challenged the cowardly Christian general to combat.

This deadly affront to Cornelius, in the presence of the army stirred him deeply. Quickly he looked to his arms, and was about to dash forward, when the reins of his horse were suddenly seized. He looked up in astonishment, and saw Cahina, speechless with fright. Cold beads of perspiration stood upon her forehead. Her face was livid, and her eyes looked aghast. She gasped for breath a moment, then, recovering her voice, cried in tones of deepest anguish: "Thou shalt not leave me to fight that bloodthirsty fiend. He will kill thee, as he has killed the others. I cannot live without thee, Cornelius. Thou shalt not go!"

Vehemently Cornelius cried: "He has branded me as a coward before the whole army, and his blood or mine must wipe out the stain. Remove thy grasp."

He urged his horse forward as he spoke, but she clung to the reins with such a desperate clutch that she was dragged from the saddle to the ground before he could check his steed. The fall lacerated her face and hands. In mute supplication she displayed her

bleeding face, so that his heart was deeply touched at her solicitude for his life.

"Let me go," he cried, in softer accents. "My honor and the honor of the army demand that I fight this Moslem warrior."

At this her face became horror-stricken, and she cried, as one seized with sudden madness: "Then go, but thou must drag my corpse along with thee, and lay it as a blood-offering at Hassan's feet before he sends thy soul to Paradise to join mine."

Hassan observed Cahina's attempt to detain Cornelius. In tantalizing tones, he cried out: "Does the unholy lust of the Sorceress-Queen restrain her Christian lover from engaging in honorable strife?"

This infamous slander, publicly delivered, made Cornelius utterly deaf to Cahina's appeal: but she still convulsively grasped the reins. He could not suddenly release her hold without actual violence, but he firmly pulled at his horse. Her bloodshot eyes cast one last furtive glance toward the city. No glitter of steel met her longing gaze. Like a hunted animal brought to bay, she vaulted into her saddle, still holding with one hand the bridle of the horse Cornelius rode, while with the other she grasped her horse's reins.

When firmly seated in the saddle, she exclaimed, in exultation: "The gods have given thee to me, and mine thou shalt remain at any sacrifice." Then she continued, muttering incoherently to herself: "I cannot give him up. I love him more than crown or glory." In an instant her head drooped, and she prayed: "Oh, ye gods, aid me in this moment of sore trouble."

She remained for a moment in an attitude of listening,

then raised her head. Cornelius saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"The gods have spoken," he heard her murmur dreamily: "his life will be saved; but oh, at what a sacrifice. Forgive me, brave and noble Berbers."

Then, before Cornelius could move further, and as if steeling her heart against the future, she ordered an immediate attack on the Moslems. Then she released the reins she had held so persistently, saying as she did so: "Now, Cornelius, we will stand together in the clash of battle. We will meet this wretch who dares assail the purity of thy bride."

Side by side Cahina and Cornelius, followed by the army, moved forward. Without raising their voices in a single cheer for their marabout Queen, as of yore, without one Berber yell, without one defiant battle-cry, Cahina's troops marched in dogged silence into the jaws of death.

Hassan, patiently waiting for the sacrifice of another victim, discerned the formation of the Berber army for the fray. With a smile of contempt upon his handsome features, he issued a few hasty orders to his generals.

The conflict that followed could hardly be called a battle. It was simply the massacre of a small force, deliberately charging into a death-trap, strategically laid for it by a skilful general at the head of overwhelming numbers. As the Berber army raised aloft its spears at hurling distance, the Mohammedan army divided, and the Berber forces were in a short time so densely wedged in on all sides by countless numbers that there did not seem to be sufficient space for the hurling of a spear.

Ere Cahina's army had time to recover from surprise at its desperate situation, a loud trumpet-blast sounded in the Moslem ranks, and at the same instant a flag of truce fluttered beside the Moslem standard. Upon seeing this flag of truce, Cornelius sheathed his sword,—a signal for all his followers to do likewise. Then the stentorian voice of Hassan was heard, exclaiming: "This message to the pagan Queen—yield thee and thine army as prisoners of war, and swear that thou and thy followers will embrace the Koran, and thy lives will be spared, and thy kingdom restored to thee as a province of the Caliph. Refuse, and ye shall be put to the sword."

Cahina faced her horse about, and addressing her encompassed followers, said, with the old inspiring ring in her voice: "Ye have heard the proclamation of the Moslem general: all those willing to save their lives by accepting his terms, have my full consent to do so; but as for myself," she defiantly shouted, "I would rather die by the sword than live by the Koran."

Her brave words and example electrified the men, at the awful moment when certain death was staring them in the face.

"Thy words are ours;" all shouted with one accord, "death rather than the Koran."

With a smile of triumph illuminating her features, Cahina ordered the trumpeter at her side to give a loud blast. Silence having been secured, she turned toward Hassan, and, in loud, clear tones, gave her reply:

"To the Commander of the Moslem robbers, the destroyer of men's souls, the slayer of weak women and helpless children—thou hast heard the answer of my

faithful followers—death rather than the Koran. Now begin your slaughter!"

Again facing her devoted soldiers, Cahina cried: "Fight for your lives boldly, and follow me through the enemy's ranks."

She dug her spurs deeply into the sides of her horse and dashed recklessly against the line of Arab spears. Just as she was about to breast the spears, Hassan and his staff swept between Cahina and his own troops. He again shouted to the Queen to yield, but her only answer was to strike and slash fiercely at the nearest Arabs, who, becoming exasperated at the furious onslaught, were about to cut her down, when Hassan ordered that she and Cornelius be not injured, but be captured alive.

In obedience to this order the Moslems gradually closed in upon them, warding off their blows without striking back, until finally they were so closely hemmed in as to be unable further to wield their swords, which were suddenly wrested from their grasp, while a dozen rude hands pulled the Queen and Cornelius off their horses. Hassan ordered that his illustrious prisoners be conducted to his tent, and there carefully guarded until his further directions.

The ill-fated day terminated with the brutal massacre of the brave mountaineers, who refused the clemency of the victor at the sacrifice of their religion. Not one was left to return to his mountain fastness and relate to his clan the fate of absent kinsmen. Thus, it happened, all the males of several tribes were wholly exterminated, so that their women and children either died of starvation or were adopted by neighboring tribes.

*Chapter Fourteen.*

## A Conqueror Turned Teacher.

THE slaughter of the Berbers being complete, Hassan marched his army toward the city, to give battle to the reserve forces of the Queen. As he arrived at the dismantled gates a strange sight met his gaze. The entire army, composed partly of the mercenaries, and partly of the soldiers taken from Constantine and other cities, threw their weapons on the ground and knelt beside them; while several of their generals, with flags of truce waving from their sword-points, approached the victorious commander. Abdallah advanced first, and, when he came in front of Hassan, he prostrated himself to the ground, and kissed the dust on the Moslem's feet.

"Great conqueror," he said, "grant me leave to speak a few words to you."

Hassan indignantly interrupted him, saying: "Kneel not to mortal man, but to Allah alone. Rise, thou cowardly pagan dog, and quickly state thy mission."

Still on his bended knees, with his face upturned to Hassan, Abdallah meekly replied: "Oh, mighty conqueror of the world, I am Abdallah, a general of the corps, composed of the traders and artisans from the cities. We do not wish to give thee battle; we desire

to surrender. We have no feeling against thee, thy religion, or thy Caliph, and we greet thee as our saviour rather than as our conqueror. I pray thee, noble General, accept our arms and let us depart in peace."

Even the ruthless Arab felt the shamefulness of this cowardice, and, with open contempt, mingled with curiosity, he demanded: "Why art thou desirous of deserting the standard of thy brave Queen?"

"Conqueror of Africa," replied the obsequious Moor, "our Queen has proved a false prophetess, and while we relied upon her delusive visions, she has foolishly laid waste our properties in the cities, and destroyed our fields and gardens in the plains; therefore, merciful lord, hear our prayer, and permit us, under thy benign government, to return to our warehouses in the city and to our farms in the valley, to build anew our homes, thus wickedly destroyed by her false zeal."

"Is there not some sympathy or loyalty still remaining in the hearts of thy soldiers for the restoration of Cahina to her throne?" asked Hassan.

"The gods forbid!" tremulously cried Abdallah. "We would rather be the slaves of our Moslem conquerors than the subjects of this Sorceress-Queen, who, impelled by some foul inspiration of the evil spirit, devastated her country and impoverished her subjects."

"Ah!" answered Hassan, while a smile lighted his features. "I perceive that thy countrymen are actuated by two motives in thus welcoming my invasion: like the Jews wandering in the desert, hankering after the flesh-pots they had abandoned in Egypt, so are thy people hankering for the return of the flesh-pots destroyed by thy Queen. Again, you have lost faith in the

childish rites of your idolatrous religion, and in the pretended miracles produced by your false priests. Now," he went on exultantly, "I rejoice to see you voluntarily abandon the abominable worship of idols and sacrifices to the god of fire."

His religious fanaticism rising higher every moment, he then cried out: "Remain in this humble attitude until thou dost hear through me the command of the Caliph, Commander of the Faithful."

Abdallah and his comrades continued kneeling, under the burning sun, meekly awaiting the harsh conditions that were to be imposed upon them by the inexorable conqueror.

Hassan leaped from his horse, and quickly advanced to the prostrate generals, his sword held aloft in his right hand, the Koran resting in his left; his eyes glittered with the fire of religious enthusiasm.

"The Commander of the Faithful will spare thy lives," he shouted, "on one condition: that thou dost swear on the Koran that thou wilt accept the Moslem religion, and that thou wilt implicitly obey the Apostle of Allah and Commander of the Faithful in planting the standard of the true faith in the uttermost ends of the world." Then he sternly demanded: "Dost thou sincerely prefer the laws of the Koran to the cruel rites of Moloch's worship?"

Enthusiastically those present shouted: "We do."

"'Tis well," cried Hassan, with satisfied mien. "Thy lives are spared; thou art now enrolled in the great army of the true believers, and art entitled, in times of peace, to the same emoluments and temporal benefits as those born in the Faith. In time of war

thou art expected to fight for Allah and his Prophet without faltering. Shouldst thou fall in battle, Allah will reward thee with the joys of Paradise."

Soon thirty thousand proselytes, who but a short time before were zealous pagans, were loudly shouting: "Allah-il-Allah! there is but one God, and Mahomet is his Prophet. May Hassan, the noble, the merciful, live a thousand years."

Hassan turned to the mercenaries. They had been standing apart, contemptuously looking at this scene of wholesale proselytism. He imperiously demanded: "Are ye prepared to embrace the Koran, or pay tribute? and if ye refuse both, to die by the sword?"

"'Tis true, great conqueror," bravely spoke their general, "we are mercenaries; but, at the same time, we are citizens of the Byzantine sovereign, with whom thy Caliph is at peace. As we have not been captured while committing any overt act of hostility against thee, thou hast no right over us. Our trade is fighting, and we are loyal to those who employ us; but since Queen Cahina did not keep her compact, and failed to pay our stipulated wages, we owed her no further allegiance, and refused to join in battle against thee. But, we confess, had she paid our dues as she had agreed, we should have fought faithfully under her standard until the last man of us perished in her cause."

This bold declaration, instead of rousing the anger of the grim Arab commander, stirred within him religious reflection. After musing a few moments, he again addressed the general of the hired troops:

"Although I despise a vocation that requires men to sell for gold their courage and their blood to the highest

bidder, yet ye are brave men and true to your employer. We of the true faith fight in the service of Allah, not for earthly gain nor the fading enjoyments of this world, but look ever for our reward in the pleasures and delights of Janat Aden, the garden of Paradise. I would fain have thee and thy companions join the faithful and also reap thy reward in reveling in the perpetual delights of the seventh heaven."

"Nay, noble General," bluntly answered the mercenary, "it cannot be. We are Christians, and cannot adopt thy religion."

"I will urge ye no longer," angrily replied Hassan. "Thine is a stubborn creed, and its worshipers are not susceptible to temptation; yet do ye fight each other for trifling and imaginary differences concerning thy religion. Depart with speed, therefore, and if any of thy troops are found in this land within three days hence, they will meet an untimely fate."

Constantine and the surrounding country was garrisoned by the new converts, who became, in truth, loyal followers of the Commander of the Faithful. Being generally Moors, they readily adapted themselves to the language and customs of the Arabs, whom they resembled in many respects, and with whom they intermingled socially and in marriage; thereby soon diffusing the Mohammedan religion throughout the land.

Hassan and his army returned to Carthage, the seat of war. The Queen, Cornelius, and all those that refused to become converts were conveyed thither under guard.

The place of confinement to which Cahina and Cornelius were conducted would have indeed been an

earthly Paradise, had it not been their prison. Nature seemed to have formed this spot as an ideal fortress for the safe custody of captives. It was a deep, bowl-like depression several miles in circumference, hollowed into one of the promontories of the precipitous rock-bound coast of Africa, bordering on the beautiful waters of the Mediterranean.

It was inaccessible on all sides, except from a narrow strip of coast, to which a path led by a gradual slope of about a hundred feet. This vale and the surrounding sides of the plateaus were thickly covered with bright green foliage, with shade and fruit trees, and wild flowers of every hue and fragrance. It was also bountifully supplied with sparkling water from a small cascade, having its source in a cleft in the overhanging rock, whence it glided along a moss-bordered channel until it broadened out into a brook that wound its tortuous way in graceful curves to the very edge of the cliff. There it mingled its sweet waters with the salt spray, whirled upward by the everlasting dash of the sea against the rocks beneath. The air was as soft and balmy as if the climate were perpetual spring.

The Moslem army camped in a circle around the valley, its tents regularly laid out in streets that intersected each other, imparting the appearance of a vast city roofed in white.

Had Cahina and Cornelius felt inclined to escape from captivity, it were vain to think of fleeing from such a rock-bound and water-circled fastness. All avenues of escape were closed. Had they entertained even a hope of passing through the tented camp, access to it was barred by Arab sentinels. Again, it were sheer madness

to attempt to descend the sharp crags forming the coast approach, dipping abruptly into the sea beneath.

Thousands of prisoners, awaiting the unalterable Moslem conditions of conversion, ransom, or death, were immured in this picturesque prison. With the view of securing the gratitude of the captives, thereby facilitating their ultimate conversion to the true faith, they were well-treated by the conqueror, and were supplied with the same food and comforts as the Moslem soldiers.

Cahina, being the most illustrious candidate for proselytism, was the recipient of unstinted kindness. Everything within the resources of her captors that could minister to her health and comfort, was supplied to her. A large tent was set apart for her special use in a lovely grove, at a distance from the other prisoners, where her party was also located. Her tent was supplied with divans, soft rugs, and many other luxuries avoided by the simple habits of her captors.

Cahina, upon entering her prison-tent, wearied mentally and physically, was overcome by feelings of unutterable sadness and despondency. She cast herself upon the couch, and abandoned her soul to a flood of hopeless despair. Visions of her tremendous fall from the height of power unfolded before her—from glory and splendor to the depth of poverty, misery, and humiliation. At last her unutterable wretchedness found vent in a burst of tears. Cornelius, standing within the tent, listened until his heart was melted by her deep anguish, and tears rolled down his cheeks. The awfulness of her sorrow affected him so keenly that he could find no words of consolation; he could only inwardly form a

silent prayer for her safety and protection. Noiselessly he stole out of her tent, leaving her to the comfort of her tears, and to such consolation as she might derive from her religion as a devotee of the god of fire.

For several days Cornelius refrained from obtruding upon her grief in the solitude of her tent. At last, fearing she was ill, he repaired thither, and, as he pushed aside the curtain of the tent, a strange sight met his astonished gaze. Cahina was reclining languorously upon the couch, her face pale and emaciated; her eyes, deep-sunken in their sockets, had an ineffably sad and wearied expression. Seated on a low cushion in front of her was Hassan, the Moslem commander, arrayed in a patched garment of the striped cloth of Yeman. An old haik, once white, but now all spotted and rent, covered his head and flowed to his bare feet. Upon his crossed legs rested his keen simitar. In his hand he held a dirty, worn book; from it he was reading to Cahina. His face was stern and immobile, hers soft, but yet defiant.

A gentle smile lighted Cahina's countenance upon the entrance of Cornelius; but Hassan turned upon him angrily.

"Nazarene," he exclaimed imperiously, "how darest thou disturb our religious meditations?"

Cornelius was about to withdraw, saying that he was unaware that they were engaged in religious studies.

"Yet stay," said Hassan, in more kindly tones, "Bishmallah Errachman! in the name of God all-powerful and just. In thy appearance I see the hand of God. From report, I learn that the Sorceress-Queen is thy betrothed and loves thee fondly. If thou hast any influence over

her mind, I advise thee to exert it, if thou wouldst save her soul from perdition and her head from the sword of the executioner. Persuade her to abandon her idolatrous religion and hearken to the holy words of Mahomet inscribed in the Koran. Besides," he continued, with lowering brow, "I do also advise thee to listen to the reading of the book of divine revelation, as thy turn will come next."

Hassan resumed his reading of the Koran, interspersed with such exclamations as: "La illaba il Allah. There is no God but God and Mahomet Resoul Allah. Mahomet is the Prophet of God. He is the corner-stone upon which our religion rests. It is necessary that thou shouldst be taught all the articles of faith required by the Koran, sufficient for the purpose of thy conversion; that thou enshrine in thy heart the fear of Eblis, the Mohammedan devil, if thou art stiff-necked and will persist in clinging to the worship of idols. But if thou art wise and shall join the true faith, thou canst then revel in the anticipation of the everlasting joys of Al Janat."

"Yes, in truth," interrupted Cahina, her eyes brightening for the first time. "In our religion we also believe in the genii. I myself have had personal communication with one of these spirits."

"Peace, idolatrous woman," harshly retorted Hassan. "Contaminate not our pure faith by comparison with thy heathenish rites."

Cahina fell back among the cushions, overcome by his harshness, and wearied by his endless repetitions.

After waiting a few moments, Hassan continued: "Rouse thyself, Cahina, from this unwomanly lassitude,

while I open to thy soul the terrors of hell. The book of divine revelation teaches us that hell is divided into seven tiers, or apartments, designed for the reception of seven distinct classes of the damned. Thou art warmly interested in the sixth alone; still, methinks thy feminine curiosity should rouse in thee a desire to know how the souls of the accursed of other classes are disposed of.

"The first story of hell, called Jehenna, is reserved for wicked Mohammedans; the second, named Ladha, is assigned to the Jews; the third, al Hotama, is for the Christians; the fourth, which is al Sair, to the Sabians; the fifth, Sakar, to the Magians; while the sixth, as I have said, is left for idolators, like thyself; and the seventh, which is the lowest and worst of all, and is called al Hawijat, is the abode of those hypocrites who outwardly make a show of religion but in their hearts believe not that which they profess.

"Mahomet cherished a deeper resentment against idolators than against any other class of unbelievers, holding them to be veritable sons of Eblis. He abhorred all worshipers of idols, and he ordered their destruction. He hated the creed thou dost uphold, and therefore designated for believers in it the depth of hell next above that of the hypocrites.

"When an idolator enters these regions of terror, the examiners, named Monker and Nakir, beat him on the temples with iron maces until he roars mightily with anguish. Then he is gnawed and stung by ninety-nine dragons, each with seven heads, until the resurrection. And," continued Hassan, in deep, solemn tones, "on his feet are fastened sandals of fire, the fervor of which

will cause the contents of his skull to boil as if in a caldron. But this is not all. The idolator will be scorched black, and in this condition the unhappy creature will remain for nine hundred years before he will be washed with the water of life and be revived.

"Still these are not all the terrors of Jehenna. The trees have writhing serpents for branches, bearing as fruit the heads of demons; and the fierce angel Thabeck, the executioner that presides over this region, sentences the Gueber fire-worshipers——"

Before Hassan could finish his terrible picture, Cahina sprang to her feet, her intelligence insulted by the gruesome tale.

"I can no longer endure thy description of the dark and imaginary hell depicted by thy visionary Prophet," she cried testily. "Why, Moslem captor, art thou bent on depicting to my woman's imagination the pains of hell, instead of the joys of heaven? Thinkest thou my fears are more easily roused than my longings for joy and happiness?"

"Out upon thee, pagan witch," responded Hassan. "If within forty days and nights from this hour thou hast not become converted to the true faith, thy life shall pay the penalty."

He turned abruptly and strode away, pausing long enough, however, at the entrance to the tent to say in kindlier tones: "If my painting of the joys of heaven would turn thee to the faith of Islam, then will I, when I instruct thee further, open to thy pagan soul the promised delights of the garden of Paradise."

He was about to walk away, leaving her to her own reflections, when Cahina bade him stay.

"Your Prophet hath said," she remarked, in seeming mischief, "'Every woman who dieth and her husband is pleased with her, shall enter into Paradise.' Now, as I have no husband, Mohammedan or otherwise, the gates of thy delightful heaven must be barred to me."

"Wanton idolatress," Hassan roared angrily. "Remember—thou must decide in forty days between the Koran and the sword." And he was gone.

Cahina sprang to her feet, and, gesticulating wildly, cried out: "Oh, ye gods! this man's tyranny and fanatic persecution are tearing my heart out. Oh, Cornelius, Cornelius," she wailed, letting her head sink upon his breast, "I can endure this agony no longer. Take me away from this Moslem hell, or I will cast myself down yon precipice."

Cornelius endeavored, with words of hope and sympathy, to calm her wild emotions; but in vain. He then faintly intimated that all further suffering could be avoided by compliance with Hassan's wishes; but he felt her body so quiver with indignation within his arms, that he expected she would tear herself away from his embrace and spring upon him like a tigress. Instead, she simply raised her eyes to his and gazed at him contemptuously.

"Nay, my dear Queen," he hastened to say, "I did not really mean that. I know thine indomitable spirit, and I but wished to be sure that it still endured. Forgive this trial, and never again will I refer to a subject so despised by us both."

A flow of silent tears—a gentle pressure of reproach—indicated both punishment and forgiveness. Cornelius then broke the painful silence by suggesting that

he would propose to Hassan the payment of a large ransom for her release, which, he doubted not, the Byzantine Emperor, for several reasons of State, would gladly pay.

A gleam of hope revived her drooping spirits, and, with it, her regal training asserted itself. Raising her head, she said, in tones marked by her former dignity: "Yea, Cornelius, I authorize thee, as my ambassador, to treat with the Moslem general for my release on payment of a ransom."

Cornelius was about to withdraw and to seek Hassan, with the celerity of one anxious to please his sovereign, when she unceremoniously seized his arm.

"Oh, Cornelius," she faltered softly, "I am only a woman. For an instant I imagined that I was still a Queen, commanding my vassal. Forgive me!" In pathetic manner she continued: "I have no control over thee, not over a single being on this earth—no, not even over a tire-woman nor a female slave. I am indeed myself a slave."

Then, as if overwhelmed by the immensity of her loss, she sank upon the floor, convulsed with agony, now a prey to the most bitter grief and the vainest regrets at the immeasurable folly of her inspired edict, which had devastated her empire and brought in its train a seemingly endless series of evils and disasters.

After her grief had spent itself in sobs that shook her poor tired body till she was exhausted, Cornelius gently replaced her on the couch, and sought to calm her by leading her worn and weary mind away from the source of its misery; he tried also to instil a glimmer of hope into her despairing soul.

"Cahina, dear," he said, in the gentle soothing tone one would use to a sick child, "do not give way to these morbid feelings of gloom and despair. The veil of darkness that now hides from thee all the brightness of life, will soon be drawn aside, and then, dear, thy life will pass amid joy and sunshine, and thy days will be restful and happy in the fulfilment of thy heart's most cherished desires."

He had so many things to tell her that should make her very happy and should crowd out all sorrow from her heart. Hassan had allowed him to despatch a messenger to Constantinople for his ransom, and by the same courier he had forwarded a message to the Emperor Leontius, imploring his intercession in her behalf. He had no doubt whatever that the Emperor would hearken to the appeal, and that long before the time for her conversion had expired, the ship that would bring his ransom would also convey a greater treasure—an embassy, with rich presents for Hassan, as an offering to obtain her release. Were not these things great enough to make her dry her eyes, and calm herself and look to the brightness of the future?

Then he portrayed the charm of a voyage over the blue sea, on their journey to Constantinople, and the new life it would give to her. Though the mention of Constantinople had roused the memory of another name dear to him, yet, through his sympathy, he mechanically continued his task of consolation, by picturing how happy she would be in a villa on the shores of the lovely Bosphorus, and she would be her old self again, banishing from her life all regrets and all memories of her sorrows. She lay so quiet and motionless, that Cornelius

knew not whether his words of solace had fallen on deaf ears; but a gentle pressure of her hand assured him that his cheering words had been heard.

Satisfied with his efforts, Cornelius was about to retire, when she opened her eyes and faintly said: "Dearest Cornelius, your allusions to kindred and peaceful homes kindle in my heart a desire to have some of my own flesh and blood near me in this crisis of my life. Pray ask Hassan to send hither my grandmother, Naomi. And now, good-night, my dear, kind protector, and may the blessings of the great unknown Ruler of the heavens and the earth, worshiped alike by all sects, descend upon thy noble head."

Seeing her in such a mood of love and tenderness, Cornelius gave utterance to an idea that had been in his mind for some time.

"Permit me to suggest, Cahina," said he, "something that may save thee from further persecution by the fanatic general. Exert thy secret power upon him when he inflicts his catalogue of the heavens and hells, which form so great a part of his bigoted doctrines, and thus lead his thoughts to other channels."

"Alas, Cornelius," she replied, without embarrassment, "gladly should I follow thy advice,—because it is thine and because it is good,—but I fear that since the consuming fever attacked my brain this divine power has left me, though its light seems now to be returning gradually. When it shall come back to me with force undiminished, I promise thee we will go forth hand in hand from this rock-bound prison to that paradise of earthly happiness thou hast so vividly described to my soul."

Cornelius instinctively felt that what she said was true, as her mystic power had wholly ceased to dominate his senses. Its influence no longer absorbed his mind to the exclusion of the image of his earlier love, whose premature death Cahina had revealed to him in one of her trances. More and more he recalled the features, the carriage, and the very tones of her whom he had left in Constantinople, awaiting his return. The passion that he had at one time felt for Cahina, had been replaced by a feeling of compassion and profound pity at the impending fate that menaced her.

On the following day, while Cornelius was conversing with Cahina about the prospects of an early reply from the Emperor Leontius, a Moslem soldier entered the tent unannounced, followed by a tall woman. Although her face was concealed by an impenetrable veil, such as was usually worn by the Arab women, she was dressed in the style of the Greeks, and her figure was lithe and graceful: from that it might be surmised she was young and handsome. The soldier said, briefly, that Hassan sent this young woman, who was taken prisoner at Constantine, to Cahina as her maid-servant; he then left the tent.

The woman seemed agitated. Her bosom rose and fell as if she were struggling with some great emotion, and she remained standing upon the spot where the soldier placed her, without uttering a sound. Cahina, seeing her excitement, said kindly: "Thou art welcome, my child. Sit next to me on this divan, and seek to compose thyself." Mechanically the new-comer obeyed. "Remove thy veil," said Cahina. "And fear not, thou art among friends."

The woman hesitated; then, as if she had arrived at a heroic conclusion, she spasmodically tore the veil off, and cast herself upon her knees before the Queen.

"Oh, forgive me, most noble Queen!" she exclaimed in a beseeching voice.

Cahina scrutinized the beautiful face of the supplicant. Then she cried, as she drew herself away, as if stung by a viper: "By the gods! it is the infamous wanton Aspasia, whom I drove out of my kingdom, that the Moslem despot has sent me as my companion. Ah!" she continued, "this is but another measure adopted by the fanatic to mock and degrade me. Begone!" she cried bitterly, "and do not poison the pure air I breathe, which is now all that is left me in my misery and misfortune."

Aspasia, however, persistently remained kneeling, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Oh! be merciful, noble Queen," she said humbly: "thrust me not forth without a hearing." Waiting not for permission she continued: "When thou didst drive me out of Constantine, I repaired at once to the house of a Christian priest, where I have tarried until now, leading a virtuous and exemplary life, engaged with the holy man in works of charity, relieving the distress of the poor, ministering to the sick, and implanting in the benighted souls of heathens the pure and pious teachings of Christianity. After the defeat of the army, the good man and I repaired to the battle-field to help the wounded, among whom I found Rezin, suffering from a terrible wound upon the forehead, and totally blind. While stanching his flowing blood, we were captured by the Moslem soldiers and brought

before their general. On refusing to comply with his commands to become converts to the Moslem religion, we were sent here as prisoners. I have just left Rezin and the Christian priest among the other prisoners, to come hither and work for thee as a devoted slave. Oh, spurn me not; I have tried to make atonement for my sinful career, by devoting my life to good works. No one can now point the finger of scorn at me, nor reproach me; for my life at present is pure and unblemished, and shall continue so until the Lord calls me unto Him."

Aspasia's story seemed to plunge Cahina into a deep reverie, which lasted for some little time. Then, rousing herself, she addressed Cornelius, while looking at the fair disciple of the new religion.

"If this remarkable story be true," she said, "the Christian faith must indeed present to women sunk in depravity the most alluring and convincing arguments to persuade them to abandon a life of revelry, and to devote it to the welfare of mankind. Yet, aside from her life of piety, which concerns me not, if she succored my wounded soldiers, and relieved the sufferings of Rezin my preserver, she has in my eyes atoned for her wicked past, and I will freely forgive her."

Addressing Aspasia, she said in milder tones: "For the present thou canst remain here, and my tongue will refrain from further reproaches. Meanwhile, I shall request Hassan to send Rezin and your Christian priest hither, and if they confirm thy story, I will efface thy past life completely from my memory."

Next day, by permission of Hassan, the Christian priest led the sightless Rezin to Cahina's tent. It was

truly a pitiable sight to see that robust man, with head bowed low, led along like a helpless child. When told that he was in the presence of his Queen, he raised his head erect and strained his sightless eyes to pierce the veil of darkness, that he might catch even a dim outline of her whom he still adored.

After Cahina had expressed her deep sorrow for the terrible affliction visited upon her faithful servant, she engaged those present in the discussion of events occurring both before and after the recent disastrous campaign; she adroitly managed to touch upon those incidents in which Aspasia claimed to have taken part. The answers of Rezin and the priest fully corroborated the truth of the story she had related.

"Aspasia," exclaimed Cahina warmly, "thou hast been purified in the fire of self-sacrifice. Remain thou with me, not as my servant but as my companion. And thou, brave Rezin, and thou, good priest, must pitch thy tents next to those of Cornelius and mine. It is a boon the Moslem general will not refuse me."

The days that passed in the augmented company of this little prison-colony, consisted mainly of cheerful discourse while they strolled on balmy days along the picturesque banks of the promontory, towering above the grand expanse of the billowy sea, their anxious thoughts lulled to sleep by the music arising from the murmur of the rolling waves. The bloom of health, the vigor of mind, and the magnetic fire soon came back to Cahina. She seemed much like her old self as she wandered, with Cornelius by her side, along the frowning cliffs, absorbing the pure air that mingled with the refreshing mist from the foaming breakers beneath.

*Chapter Fifteen.*

# The Meeting on the Cliff.

HALF of the fateful period in which Cahina must decide between accepting the Koran or dying by the sword had now expired. But even to the keenest observer she betrayed neither fear nor weakness. Her spirits seemed really to become more buoyant, her dark eyes flashed with their old-time brilliancy, and a brighter, happier expression appeared on her face. No stranger, seeing her as she walked, or talked, or sat alone in the sunshine at the door of her tent, would have dreamed that she was under a sentence of death within twenty days, —unless she should save herself by accepting the religion of her enemies.

Cornelius believed that her mysterious power had returned, and that she was exerting it over Hassan's mind. Every day the Moslem general visited her tent to impart religious instruction to her. In his left hand he always held a copy of the Koran, and in his right hand, instead of the sword, he carried some trifling gift for her. Her companions were strictly prohibited from entering her tent during the hours of religious teaching. Cornelius noted that Hassan generally departed with a pleased smile on his face, and that Cahina was not weak

from weeping, as on former occasions, nor wild with anguish at the torments of the Moslem fanatic's persecution. On the contrary, after Hassan's departure she appeared even more cheerful, as if inwardly exulting over some secret triumph,—a triumph of which she never spoke.

None of her companions could discern from her demeanor just what course she would adopt on the fatal day. Though uniformly gentle and loving toward Cornelius, she did not confide in him, nor did he, as her affianced husband, exact any confidence from her in this respect. Only upon one occasion, in a burst of indignation, did she give an inkling of what were her true feelings. It was while they were all assembled in her tent, on a rainy day, and Rezin was relating the story he had heard from one of the lately-arrived prisoners, concerning the fate of Askalon.

As the tale ran, the gold that Cornelius had instructed the high-priest and Askalon to take from the grotto to pay the mercenaries, was conveyed by them to the temple, and instead of distributing it among the clamorous soldiers, they had divided it, like honorable thieves, equally between themselves. Askalon placed his share in a large ironbound casket, and ordered eight priestly slaves to carry it on their shoulders across the desert, whence he intended to flee to the nearest seaport. One of the slaves, who was about to become a novitiate and was more intelligent than the others, knew of the contents of the casket, and, with his fellow-slaves, hatched a conspiracy to compel Askalon to surrender to them one-half the treasure.

When at a safe distance from the city, upon a signal

from the ring-leader, the treasure-box was dropped upon the sands, and the novitiate boldly told Askalon that the slaves knew that the casket was designed for the soldiers, and demanded one-half of it for himself and his companions. Askalon flew into a dreadful rage, and, with clenched fist, struck the spokesman in the face, whereupon the others seized Askalon and securely bound his hands and feet. Then they emptied the casket of gold, and divided its contents equally among them, in full view of Askalon, who rained curses at them and swore deadly vengeance. The novitiate, smarting with pain from Askalon's blow, with the assistance of two others, seized the ex-Prime Minister and threw him into the empty coffer; in mocking tones they told him he might wag his foul tongue to the demons, in his transit to Hades in his golden casket.

Askalon begged piteously to be released from this living tomb, telling them they could have all his gold if they would only spare his life; but compassion was unknown to these slaves of the temple. Gleefully they slammed the lid upon the casket, thus burying alive their cruel task-master. They then fled.

The high-priest was found by Hassan's soldiers. Torture being applied, he disgorged his share of the stolen treasure, and confessed Askalon's participation in the robbery. The Moslem soldiers were sent in all directions to find Askalon, and they found the casket in the desert near the city. On opening it they discovered the body of Askalon—instead of the gold they so zealously sought.

When the story was finished, Cahina exclaimed in a burst of rage: "It was but justice that Askalon should

die thus. He was false to his country, false to his Queen, and false to his gods; he surely deserved his terrible fate."

Then she stopped suddenly, as if she had inadvertently betrayed her emotions; she quickly changed the conversation.

Only five days remained before the choice between the Moslem simitar and the Koran was to be made. That night, Naomi, Cahina's grandmother, almost bent double with age, was brought into Cahina's tent by her Moslem guides.

It was a sight that brought tears to the eyes of all, to behold this haughty Queen, dethroned as she was, in the flush of health and in the morning of life, fall upon her knees before the aged Jewess. Even then her stately head towered above the bent form of her grandmother as she threw her arms round Naomi's neck and laid her head upon that withered bosom, as she had done when a motherless girl, and had sobbed away the trials and sorrows of childhood.

"Oh! grandmother," she moaned, in heartrending accents, "how glad am I that my nearest kin is with me during this ordeal of my life. I will not grieve thee by relating the cruel humiliations to which I have been subjected."

Then, like one threatened by a sudden danger, she whispered something into Naomi's ear, and, gradually growing more excited, her voice became audible.

"Leave me not in this crisis of my life," Cornelius heard her say. "In five days this awful suspense will be over." Then, speaking as if in a reverie, she added: "Again I feel the approach of my good spirit. Even

now I see the shadow of my sainted mother hovering near me." As she spoke, she sprang to her feet. In her eyes Cornelius noted the same glassy stare he had seen on similar occasions. "Look, grandmother!" she cried, "there above the entrance of the tent I see the spirit of your daughter."

Poor Naomi hobbled after her grandchild, and took her gently by the hand, saying: "Cahina, there are no spirits. We of the Jewish faith are taught that the spirits of the departed do not revisit the land of the living. The spirit you behold is but the phantom of your brain. Come, my child," she said soothingly, while leading Cahina to the couch. "I have some pleasing tidings for thy private ear, from thy Berber home."

Thereupon Cornelius and the others withdrew and left the old Jewess and her grandchild together.

Only four days remained for Cahina to decide between the Koran and the sword. As Cornelius entered the tent on the first of these days, he found her lying listlessly upon the couch, her eyes gazing at the roof. Naomi sat next to her on a high cushion, tenderly clasping her hand. An open manuscript in Hebrew letters was lying on Naomi's lap.

"Thou must remain firm, my child," the grandmother was saying. "I would rather see thee laid in thy grave than a votary of this accursed religion. Embrace not a religion that has robbed thee of thy crown and thy freedom, and that would rob thee of thy soul. Think of the glorious example of the Beni Koraida, who were the direct descendants of the great Queen Esther. When they refused to become converts, Mahomet drove them out of Medina. They sought refuge in a

strong castle near the city, where they remained many days without food. When the pangs of hunger compelled them to implore terms of their cruel besiegers, Mahomet promised to allow them to leave the country unmolested. The Beni Koraida gladly agreed to these terms, and seven hundred men, women, and children surrendered. Saad, a tool of Mahomet, treacherously put them all to death, with the exception of Rihanna, the most beautiful maiden of the tribe, whom Mahomet forcibly converted to the faith, and added her to the long list of his wives. I pray to Jehovah that mine aged eyes may never witness the shameful and degrading sight of my noble granddaughter in the arms of a Moslem husband."

"Grandmother," replied Cahina, "my reign has ne'er been sullied by a single unworthy or disgraceful act, nor will my womanly pride be lowered now, even though a helpless prisoner; nor will I do aught that is dishonorable or cowardly."

They continued thus until Cornelius returned and announced his presence.

Cahina was consoled by the soothing words of Naomi; for she informed her grandmother of her betrothal to Cornelius, and of their contemplated marriage,—if they should ever gain their freedom.

The aged Queen seemed greatly agitated at this announcement. Her wrinkled face and dimmed eyes plainly showed her displeasure, but she refrained from giving vent to it; she simply said, while reproachfully looking at Cahina, that Cornelius was a Christian. She was about to say more when she was interrupted by the entrance of Aspasia, Rezin, and the Christian priest.

Then Cahina laughingly exclaimed that her grandmother wished that Cornelius were one of the chosen tribe, that he might be more worthy of her hand. This led to a general conversation on the subject of religion, after which they separated for the night, somehow comforted in spirit, despite all their sorrows.

The following day proved an eventful one to Cahina and Cornelius. The balmy atmosphere, the cooling breeze, the smiling aspect of the scenery allured Cahina to propose an excursion to the encampment of the other prisoners. The bright sunlight was playing on trees and foliage, on the rugged coast above, and on the rippling waves beneath. The birds seemed to sing more cheerily, the hues of the myriads of flowers seemed more brilliant, and their perfume more fragrant, as they wandered along the wild and picturesque coast, toward the camp set apart for the common prisoners. Despite the thick veil that Cahina wore, to conceal her identity, her former subjects recognized their fallen Queen by her graceful form and stately carriage. It was a sad sight to see them fall on their knees and prostrate themselves upon the ground as she silently passed them. Tears sprang to her eyes, and her bosom heaved with sad emotions.

"It breaks my heart, Cornelius," she exclaimed sorrowfully, "to witness the mute devotion of these faithful beings to their fallen Queen. Let us return."

They had retraced their steps but a short distance when they saw a maiden, clad in white, walking with bowed head toward them from the opposite direction, on the narrow path along the cliff. When she came nearer she raised her head. Cornelius stood like one

rooted to the ground. His face grew pale, and his knees trembled as he beheld the apparition of one whose image was ever in his mind, though he had thought of her as no longer in the land of the living. Instinctively he opened his arms.

In an instant he knew it was no apparition. Did he not feel Julia's head nestling on his breast, and did he not hear his name whispered in an accent of devotion? He became completely oblivious to his surroundings, and wished only that his present happiness might last forever.

He was wakened from his dream of love; he felt his arms torn away roughly from Julia's waist, and heard a voice hissing in his ears: "Thou art mine by the laws of the gods and of man. How darest thou embrace another?"

He glanced up and saw Cahina, in a tremor of rage, desperately clutching his arms. His reverie of love vanished when he saw that inexorable face, its stern eyes glaring at him; yet he resolved to speak the truth at any cost. In calm tones he replied that, He had plighted his troth to Cahina when believing Julia to be dead, as she had told him; but now he begged the Queen to release him.

In a paroxysm of rage, painful to behold, Cahina fiercely cried, that, if she were still Queen of Mauritania he would not desire his freedom; but that as she had fallen from her high estate, he now selfishly asked to be released.

"Stop!" commanded Cornelius angrily. "If thou dost impute such a dishonorable motive to me, I will carry out this enforced compact; but remember," he

added, "I give thee only my hand. My love, my life, my heart, my soul,—all belong to Julia."

This declaration, instead of appealing to her pride, only roused a storm of hatred and jealousy in her breast. With unbridled temper she passionately shrieked: "Never wilt thou see again thine unworthy love—she shall perish before thine eyes."

Cahina bounded like an enraged tigress toward Julia, who stood bewildered at the vehemence of the Queen; with the strength of desperation, she quickly pushed the unresisting maid toward the edge of the yawning precipice.

With a cry of horror, Cornelius ran after Cahina, and fortunately caught them both within a few paces of the brink of the cliff. Forcibly he unclasped Cahina's arms from Julia, who, half-dazed from fright, would have fallen over the cliff had he not caught her in his arms and carried her away.

Then they heard an unearthly shriek, and, looking toward Cahina, they saw her fiercely compress her forehead with both hands, and sway to and fro like a reed before a fierce gust of wind, while she moaned: "Oh, my brain, my brain!" Then she reeled and fell heavily upon the greensward. Her limbs became rigid, her fists clenched, and a light foam appeared at the corners of her mouth.

The priest, who came quickly on the scene, was skilled in medicine: he declared that she had been seized with an epileptic fit. They prepared a litter from the branches of trees, and tenderly placed Cahina upon it. When the bearers reached her tent, they left her to the care of Naomi and Aspasia.

To the reunited lovers, there was but one cloud in their sky—the memory of the tragic scene on the cliffs. Despite the love-light shining in Julia's eyes, and the look of pride with which she turned to Cornelius, there was a slight reserve in her manner, as if she must have certain doubts cleared away in her mind before she could fully accept and realize this new-found joy.

Cornelius told her the whole story, told it simply, directly, and with an intensity of passionate protestation that appealed to Julia's womanly heart, and then her mind was set at ease.

Cornelius discovered, in answer to a long series of impatient questions, that Julia had been captured by Moslem sea-robbers while on her way to Africa, to learn if there were any traces of the ships in which he had sailed to Italy.

After a sleepless night, he arose next morning, greatly concerned about Cahina's health and the approaching choice of her fate.

*Chapter Sixteen.*

# The Choice Between Koran and Sword.

ONLY one short day remained for Cahina to choose between her soul and her body, between the Koran and the sword. Her first act was to despatch Aspasia to find Cornelius and to tell him that she wished to see him.

Aspasia met him as he was walking toward the Queen's tent. She delivered her message, and also informed him that, through the efforts of the priest, Cahina had quite recovered from her sudden illness of the previous day.

The Moslem camp was pervaded with an air of excitement, and as Cornelius walked briskly on his way to Cahina's tent, he saw groups of men talking earnestly together, slaves rushing hither and thither, and evidences on all sides that some event of special importance had occurred. Amru, the Conqueror of Egypt, had arrived the evening before, with an immense train of wagons filled with grain and vast amount of treasures taken from Egypt, which were intended for the Caliph and his armies.

Amru had decided to rest for a few days at Hassan's camp, on his journey to Medina. As Cornelius turned a corner of one of the tent-lined streets, he was

surprised to see the famous Amru entering Cahina's tent. The Conqueror of Egypt was unlike the modest, unassuming, and poorly-clad Arab with white haik and turban that had so impressed Askalon when he had visited Alexandria to secure the services of Nibamon as the priestly guide and teacher of Cahina. A few years had transformed Amru into an Egyptian fop, who now appeared in magnificent robes, ornamented with rich gold braid and with a reckless profusion of jewels. Brought into contact with the voluptuous, pleasure-seeking Egyptians, living in their palaces, and seeing, from day to day, the extravagance of their life, the Emir and his attendant Arabs gradually abandoned the rude and simple habits of the desert, and drifted into the luxurious living and the indolent ways of the conquered nation, and, at last, reveled in all the Oriental splendors by which they were surrounded, as if to the manner born.

When Amru entered Cahina's tent she was reclining on a divan, conversing earnestly with Aspasia, to whom she had become greatly attached. When the Queen saw the tall figure, magnificently costumed, darkening the door of her tent, she knew that it was Amru, of whose arrival she had learned through Aspasia. With a whispered word to the latter to remain in a corner of the tent, Cahina waited calmly for her visitor to declare himself.

With an "Ailikem Salem," the usual friendly greeting, Amru saluted her, then seating himself on a cushion next to the divan, upon which she was resting, he gazed upon her pale and classic features, in silence for some time, as one held captive by some subtle charm, and

unconscious of his acts. Intense, overpowering admiration for her was plainly visible in his face.

At last he broke the silence. Speaking in Arabic, he said, with the fervor of passion: "Thou art indeed a dazzling vision. Thy loveliness makes all the description I heard of thee from Askalon and others seem but feeble words, too weak even to suggest thy wondrous beauty, which far outshines all other women, as the glorious sun doth throw into eclipse the moon and all the stars."

Cahina felt that her queenly dignity was in a way degraded by the presumption and the boldness of this wooer, for whom, as her enemy, she could have no feeling of love, even were her heart not already consecrated to Cornelius. But, despite her impatient gesture of protest, the Emir continued:

"No maiden so fair as thee have mine eyes ever seen, either in the tents of the deserts or the palaces of kings. From thy messenger's portrayal of the graces of thy mind and the beauties of thy person, I have cherished, though in distant lands, a fervent admiration for thee, and my soul has ever yearned to meet thee. I longed to behold thy grace and beauty, and to listen to the charms of thy accomplishments, which I have been told are as many as the sands of the desert. If the ravishing loveliness attributed to the houris (who, as Mahomet teaches, dwell in the seventh heaven to delight man's celestial life) be as great as thine, then, truly, death is a feeble price to pay for such divine joys."

Then, as it suddenly flashed across the Emir's mind that Cahina was a captive of Hassan's army, he said in persuasive tones:

"That such superb beauty as thine should be sacrificed to the inexorable law of the sword, would be a calamity too awful for words. But hark ye, Cahina, I know a way by which it can be prevented, I know a way by which I can save thee alike from the executioner's sword and from publicly espousing the Mohammedan religion. Accept my love, and thou wilt be rescued from the alternative of self-abasement or a cruel death. Listen to my words, Cahina: it is the rule of the Koran, laid down by our great Prophet, that a disciple of the true faith may be allowed to marry an infidel woman, without the necessity of her public conversion, as, of itself, such a marriage confers upon her the religion of her husband, and entitles her to enjoy the pleasure of Paradise as his wife."

Cahina, who was concentrating all her powers of mind on this new danger, did not reply. Her dilemma had become a trilemma—Koran, Sword, or Amru. What should she do? What course of action should she take? What words should she speak that might win Amru's help and influence, without sacrificing her love, her dignity as a queen, or her honor as a woman."

Then she heard the question loom loud in her ears:

"Well, my lovely enchantress, tell me that thou dost accept my offer of marriage."

The Conqueror of nations was himself conquered; he was held captive by a woman; he whose word was law to millions, listened for one word of her who was but a prisoner of war. He scanned Cahina's face anxiously, seeking to read the answer in her eyes before it reached her lips,—but her face was as immobile and inscrutable as the Sphinx.

She fastened her black eyes, burning like two coals of fire in her pale face, upon his frank and sympathetic countenance, as if to read the innermost thoughts of his soul. After a little interval, in which a dozen courses of possible action in her mind had resolved themselves into one, and while a sweet smile played round her shapely mouth, she said in silvery tones, that sounded like music in the ears of the listener:

"I have heard that in thy youth thou wert the handsomest man in the Korish tribe, and also a famous poet, and thou wast worshiped and idolized by all the fair maidens of the tribe." Then in an insinuating voice, which sent a thrill of delight through his poetic soul, she archly continued: "Yes, an offer of marriage from so brave and accomplished a man, even though he be an Arab, is truly an honor that must not be lightly treated. Yet, noble Amru, thou must remember, although a helpless prisoner, I am the daughter of Kings, and was once a mighty Queen. It would be degrading to my station to assume an inferior position and be placed on the level with other women of thy household, therefore, before giving my answer," she cunningly added, "I would frankly ask thee, hast thou emulated the example of thy luxurious Prophet, and hast thou become the lord of several wives?"

This direct question embarrassed the devout follower of Mahomet's teachings. He became confused, blushed like a maiden, and stammered some incoherent remarks, endeavoring to justify polygamy."

"Stop," she cried indignantly, "do not attempt to deceive me. I plainly perceive by thy very look that thou art already the possessor of a list of infatuated

women anxious to gain entrance into the Mohammedan seventh heaven, to enjoy its pleasures in company with thee as their husband."

Then, with sarcasm, made even more cutting by her smile, she continued:

"Pride will not permit one of my former exalted station to become one of the common herd of married women of Islam, regarded as inferiors and forced to do menial work. It might have been otherwise if thou wert still single, and a liberal-minded poet as in thy youth, instead of a bigoted Moslem, encumbered by a small army of wives, as was thy wise Prophet, whom thy poetic soul, in thy younger days, didst jeer for this very thing."

Amru's face showed tokens of chagrin and bitter disappointment. Then it was that Cahina sought with innate Oriental craft to avail herself of his love and to touch his susceptible heart with sympathy for her. With a sweet smile on her lovely lips, and in tones of subdued emotion, she said, "If thou dost really love me as passionately as thou wouldst have me believe, art thou prepared to make a sacrifice for this love, by procuring my release without requiring selfish conditions, and thereby earn my everlasting gratitude? Perchance such feelings of gratitude may engender softer emotions in my soul."

Then it was that his Oriental craft became a match for hers. He looked at her with an incredulous smile.

"I am a disciple of the true faith," he said, "and cannot betray its cause by falsely conniving at the escape of its foremost enemy. Such action would bring everlasting ignominy and disgrace on my good name, and

shut the gates of heaven upon my face. Yet," he cried with the voice of a tempter, "there is another avenue of escape still left for thee. If thou wilt swear, in the presence of Hassan, that if he will grant thee freedom thou wilt, within a reasonable time, become my wife, I can induce him to unlock thy prison doors."

Then in impassioned and poetic strain he continued, "O beautiful enchantress! hesitate no longer. I swear on the Koran I will love and cling to thee and thee only, forsaking all others. They are mentally unfit to be my companions, and do not arouse emotions of love or loyalty in my soul, but, blessed by thy sweet love and beguiling companionship, I will be the most fortunate man in the Moslem world. Thou shalt return with me to the land of the lotus, and again be seated on a throne, but this time as the Queen of the Conqueror of Egypt. Thou shalt dwell in marble palaces far surpassing in splendor thy former one. Thou shalt be attended by hundreds of slaves ministering to thy slightest wish. And together we can study the beauty of the present and the ancient muses. Together we can read the mystic lore of the stars and the occult mysteries of the ancient priesthood. Together we can admire the picturesque shores of the Nile, with its ruins of temples and palaces, while sailing dreamily down its green waters."

"Nay, say no more," she cried, as he still continued depicting in fervent language his anticipated happiness. "I see thou art reasoning only from motives of selfish passion. Let there be a truce to this farce of mutual deception. I love another, and I will not lose my self-respect nor violate my feelings by wedding you,

whom I cannot love, even at the price of my liberty. Therefore save thy eloquence, and spare thyself all further efforts to win my heart."

Amru's eye flashed with anger, yet he suppressed it. With some acerbity he retorted, "I will not further argue the ethics of love with thee. In my race, women do not discriminate between love of men as thou dost. It is the duty of each to accept the most advantageous offer, and love is expected to follow. However, I will grant thee until to-morrow. If thou dost then accept the Koran, I will have naught to say; but if thou dost scorn the Koran; and when the bright steel of the executioner is glittering before thine eyes, an instant before the death stroke is dealt thou mayst then decide to accept me and reject this Christian lover of thine."

Then he abruptly left the tent.

After his departure, she remained for a long time silent and motionless, with head bowed upon her breast, as if absorbed in solemn reverie. Then she quickly raised her head, her eyes sparkling with their former brightness, as she saw Cornelius enter the tent. He had waited at some distance until he had seen Amru take his departure.

As Cornelius entered the tent, Cahina arose and greeted him cordially, her countenance beaming with the same sweet and alluring expression it had worn in happier times. Her simple robes were arranged in a style more coquettish than was usual with her. The pallor of her face, in contrast to the brilliancy of her eyes, enhanced the beauty of her features.

"Cornelius," she said, "I have sent for thee to crave thy pardon for my unseemly conduct yesterday. I

confess that when I saw thee clasp a rival in thine arms, a fit of rage and jealousy seized me as it would have seized any peasant woman, and I forgot what was due to my dignity. Cornelius, I love thee, and on this the last day before the one that is to decide my fate, I desire to have a serious talk with thee. For I must tell thee that there is yet an avenue of escape open to me, which I have breathed to no one, and ere the rising of to-morrow's sun we can walk forth hand in hand, free as the air we breathe."

Then, as in early days of their intercourse, she fixed her eyes, now no longer luminous or glowing with fire, upon those of Cornelius, and with persistent intensity she sought to hold his gaze and subject his will, as she had formerly done. Then she addressed him, with the same hollow-sounding voice he knew so well in former times.

"Cornelius," she said dreamily, "do not be led away from the path of love and honor by the sight of the Greek maiden. She is incapable of loving thee with the strength and fervor that I love. Thy feeling for her is mere romantic fancy; it will not endure the test of time and duty. My love for thee, on the contrary, has been tried in the zenith of my power, when I had wealth and exalted rank, and when life and death were in the hollow of my hand. I believe thee to be both a grateful and an honorable man. Thy troth is plighted to me, and I wish you to adhere to it. I adjure thee to be faithful to thy vows. I command thee, never again to look upon the face of the Greek maiden; banish her image forever from thy mind. If thou wilt do this, thou mayest yet share the glory of a throne with me,

and be invested with all its pomp and power. Swear thou wilt renounce Julia forever; swear thou wilt love me,—me alone! Obey my command. I will it."

In the ears of Cornelius her voice sounded like a wail of anguish, instead of an irresistible command, as on previous occasions. Her eyes, dimmed by sorrow, had lost their magnetism. Her mystic power had fled, the charm was broken, Cornelius was no longer spell-bound; his shackles of mental slavery were riven.

With a clear and untrammeled mind, but with soul overflowing with sympathy for her unfortunate attachment, he replied in conciliatory tones, to avoid wounding her feelings.

"Cahina," he said, "I pray thee drop the mask of mystic enchantment, and speak to me naturally. Being human, I cannot control my affections, and therefore cannot forswear my love for Julia any more than I can swear that I love only thee, but I do love and revere thee with the affection of a brother. 'Tis true I plighted my troth to thee, at a time when my mind, enchanted by thy magic arts, was incapable of asserting itself, and when I believed thine assertion that Julia was dead. Now that I have seen her, and know she is in the land of the living, and my mind is unclouded, I frankly acknowledge to thee that my love for her has reawakened with renewed strength. Yet if thou wilt insist on the fulfilment of my pledge, I will as an honorable man accompany thee to the altar,—but after that, we part forever."

Appalled at his frank avowal, her face grew ashen-pale, her eyes stared at him with a horrified look, her half-parted lips tried to speak; but they uttered no



IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MOSLEM ARMY, THE QUEEN DECIDES BETWEEN SWORD AND KORAN.

sound; she stood motionless as a statue. Then, after a moment, her power of speech returned.

"Forsaken and betrayed in the hour of peril," she whispered hoarsely, "and by the one I loved best in the world; my last hope is now gone."

Cornelius attempted to justify himself, but she motioned him to remain silent. Like one resigned to the inevitable, she bade him depart. With his heart filled with conflicting emotions Cornelius passed into the bright sunlight.

One more sun between the sword and the Koran. The fatal day had arrived. Nature had assumed its most smiling aspect; all was balm and sunshine on this serene and cloudless day.

At break of dawn, there was great bustle and commotion in the Moslem camp. The shrill notes of the trumpet, summoning the soldiers to assemble, had a mournful sound to the ears of the captives. Soon afterward, a Moslem captain, at the head of a company of soldiers fully armed, appeared before Cahina's tent and brusquely commanded her to accompany him. He also ordered Cornelius and the rest of the little colony to follow. They were marched slowly up the rocky path to the Moslem encampment, towering ominously above their heads.

On reaching the great level plain of the promontory, they perceived that the Moslem soldiers had been formed in a large, hollow square. Although the heart of Cornelius was filled with sadness, he could not, as a trained soldier, help noticing the skilful regularity of the square, and the unique and striking contrast of the garb of the soldiers composing it. Three sides were made up of Hassan's veterans, barefoot and enveloped

from head to foot in white cloaks, giving them a weird and spectral appearance.

Amru's sturdy corps, fresh from Egypt, were picturesquely arrayed in green, quilted helmets descending to the shoulders, and a corselet, worked in all colors, reaching to the waist, which was encircled by a flashy belt. From this flowed a bright-colored kilt that covered the body, and their feet were encircled in sandals. They presented a brilliant contrast to the ghostly appearance of Hassan's Arabs.

The captives were marched into the interior of the square, which glistened with burnished steel. In the center the grassy sod had been removed in the shape of a crescent, over which ashes had been strewn. Cahina was placed in the center of the crescent. The others were stationed farther back, midway between the square and the crescent, in full view of their beloved Queen.

From that position they saw that Hassan, like his veterans, was dressed in white, except that his burnouse was spotless, and his head was covered by a red fez, his feet were shod with leather sandals.

Amru was clad like his followers, except that his cuirass was heart-shaped and sleeveless, showing to great advantage his manly neck and muscular arms, and also the gold-embroidered red vest underneath. His head was covered with a dazzling bronze helmet, and his limbs were encased in buff leggins and shoes. His appearance indicated more the lover trying to win the heart of his mistress, than the bigoted exhorter trying to win the soul of a convert.

To the solemn strains of the trumpet and the doleful twang of the drum, the two Arab magnates stood in grim

silence before Cahina. When the discordant music ceased, Hassan, with unsheathed sword in his right hand and the Koran in the left, solemnly walked to the edge of the crescent, and stood silently a few moments, face to face with Cahina and her fate. It was an impressive scene. The vast assemblage of grim warriors was hushed in a death-like stillness. Not a man stirred. All stood spell-bound and motionless, like living statues, until the stentorian tones of the fanatic general broke the spell.

"La illah ha illa Allah," (there is no God but one God, and Mahomet is his Prophet) he began. "Cahina, once Queen of the Berber nation," he continued, "thou art called upon to declare whether thou art ready to become a convert to the religion of Mahomet? If thou dost refuse,—though a woman,—the avenging sword of God will spare thee not."

When the Moslem's last word died away, a painful pause ensued. Though but an instant, the time seemed long and ominous to the aching hearts of the little band of the Queen's faithful friends. With dignified air Cahina straightened up proudly. Never did she appear more queenly and imposing. Again she resembled some divine goddess of her mysterious worship, impressing all beholders with awe and grandeur. Her noble and unflinching bearing in the face of death, elicited unwilling homage from her fanatical captors.

Her soul was so deeply stirred by the wrongs she had suffered, that, in reproachful and impassioned strain, she hurled fierce defiance at Hassan, and vehemently retorted in embittered voice, penetrating every ear: "Apostle of crime and blood, cowardly robber of a woman's heritage, I defy thee and thy fanatic minions.

I loathe thy vile religion, and I abhor its false Prophet, and rather than bend my knee at its polluted shrine, I willingly bow my neck to the death-stroke of thy blood-stained sword."

Then, with disdainful mien and undaunted voice, she exclaimed, firmly, calmly, and deliberately: "Disciple of assassins, with my last breath I scorn and defy thee! Now, I am ready for aught that may come."

Hassan's cold visage turned purple with rage. The black insult Cahina heaped upon him and his religion, within hearing of his followers, lashed his fanaticism into the highest pitch of frenzy.

Firmly clutching his simitar and whirling it above her head, he was about to strike, but ere it could reach Cahina's white neck, his arm was arrested by Amru, who forcibly drew him aside, and in low tones hastily spoke a few words to him. Hassan then stepped back and stood grim and motionless, like the angel of death, while Amru advanced to Cahina and earnestly whispered something into her ear, to which she seemed to make but brief reply.

What this conversation was, under the shadow of death, no man will ever know, but judging from the look of withering contempt she gave Amru, and his sad and crestfallen expression, he stepped back from the threshold of death, not a triumphant suitor, but a scorned one. He then turned his back on Cahina, and, without a word, walked over to where his troops were resting; he became, seemingly, a disinterested spectator.

Hassan with outstretched sword quickly approached her, and cried out in bitterness:

"Idolatrous blasphemer, for the last time I ask thee, Wilt thou become a convert to the Moslem faith?"

Men held their breath. Women sobbed convulsively. Cornelius was pale and terror-stricken,—the pathetic helplessness of a strong man who knows that he can do naught to save, but must merely wait the outcome he cannot change. Rezin, blinded as he was, bent forward to listen intently, and clutched his hand by his side, as if he would draw a sword from his scabbard. Aspasia, with her hands before her face, as if to shut out the sight, trembled like a leaf. The aged Naomi seemed as one paralyzed and turned to stone. With subdued voice and bowed head Ambrosius, the Christian priest, fervently prayed to the Lord, beseeching Him to have compassion on the good Queen, and to save her from the power of her fanatic judges. The fervid words reached only the ears of the little group around Cornelius, whose hearts were deeply touched. They tried to follow his pious example; but their agonized minds failed to find words of prayer.

Cahina deigned not to reply, but, turning toward Cornelius, with an angelic light irradiating her countenance, and a look of ineffable love in her eyes, she serenely drew from her bosom the small golden cross, placed there by her dying mother, and fervently pressed it to her lips, while with her left hand she pointed to Heaven, as if to say: "There, Cornelius, we shall meet again."

At the sight of the Christian symbol, Hassan was seized with insane fury. Brutally he struck the cross from her hand, and his glistening blade flashed through the air as he shouted exultingly: "Thus shall perish the enemies of the Mohammedan religion. There is no God but one God, and Mahomet is his Prophet."

The next instant, to the unspeakable horror of those who loved her, Cahina's head rolled at his feet upon the ash-strewn crescent.

The little band of her friends were transfixed with horror. They could not speak, their hearts were too full. They were unable to realize that the spirit of their Queen had fled. They stood there, mute and motionless, gazing broken-hearted on the awful scene, until the guards ordered them to move.

Silently the Moslem army dispersed. No shouts of triumph followed their retreating footsteps. Even the pirates of the desert seemed to feel the stigma attached to the cowardly assassination of so noble a woman.

The ruthless Hassan sought to relieve his conscience and to palliate his cowardly crime by obtaining for his action the stamp of approval of his master. He, therefore, had the noble head of Cahina enclosed in a casket of sandal-wood, lined with rich velvet and studded with jewels, and conveyed with great formality to the Caliph, that he and all present and future devotees of Islamism might know of the great service that Hassan rendered to Mahomet and to the Koran.

Three days later the ship arrived from Constantinople, bringing the Emperor's ambassadors, prepared to ransom Cahina, Cornelius, and other Christian captives; but, alas! they were three days too late to save the Berber Queen. Cornelius and Julia, with loving but saddened hearts, departed from the classic shores and fertile fields of that hapless land, once made powerful and prosperous by the wise and gentle sway of the great Prophetess-Queen.

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